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THE MAN IN THE JURY
BOX

**THE MAN
IN THE JURY BOX**

By

~~ROBERT ORR CHIPPERFIELD~~

pseud. of
I. E. Ostrander

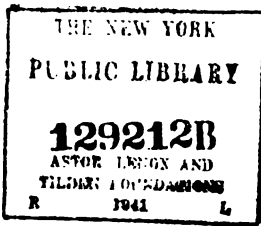


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THE MAN IN THE JURY BOX

CHAPTER I

WHERE THE BROOK TURNED

IF Jimmie Vail's Uncle Phineas hadn't given him a pair of skates for Christmas, and if he hadn't been laid up for more than a month thereafter with measles, he would not have chosen that early February morning to steal away to the pond on the Willow Brook estate, and discovered that which was to make him for a space the most important small personage in all Sunnymead.

His discovery did not please him; as a matter of fact, it frightened him so that he dropped the shining new skates and scurried like a hunted rabbit through the frozen hedge and out upon the hard-packed snow of the highroad. His mother's dingy little brown cottage, together with its chicken coops and pigsty and narrow strip of bare truck garden, elbowed for space between the stately country homes of two of the village's wealthiest commuters, and thither Jimmie's thin legs carried him as fast as they could travel.

It was not until he was well within the gate, however, that he lifted up his voice.

"Ma!—Oh, ma, come quick!"

Mrs. Myrtille Vail had appeared in the doorway with a pail of hot water to clean off the porch steps, and she surveyed him with ominous disapproval.

"I thought I sent you out to feed them pigs," she observed. "It's most school time—"

"Ma-a! Up at the Latimer's place, lyin' down by the pond with blood all 'round!" Jimmie's breath came in gasps and his eyes seemed protruding from his head. "C'm on an' see him!"

"Whatever are you talking about?" Mrs. Vail put down the pail. "*What's* up by the pond, and what were you doing there?"

"A man with a big fur coat!" Jimmie ignored the final question. "He's lyin' with his face in the snow and there's somethin' that looks like blood—! Ma, I don't feel well in my stomach!"

Jimmie sat down suddenly on the lowest step, but his mother bent over and shook him vigorously.

"You just tell me what you mean! I never saw such a boy! Is somebody sick? Did you speak to him or touch him?"

"No, 'm. I was comin' along an' I seen him, an'—an' then I ran! He didn't move nor nothin'!"

Mrs. Vail stepped past him and went swiftly down to the gate as the milk wagon approached with a whining creak of wheels in the frosty air.

"Sam, you been up to the Latimers'?"

"No, Mis' Vail, I didn't stop." The shock-headed



youth pulled up with a jerk. "They got a lot of fancy cows of their own. Why? What's the trouble?"

"I don't know as there's any." She hesitated. "Jimmie may be telling fibs again, but he says he's just been up by the Latimer's pond and there's a man lying there with his face all blood. The man didn't move and Jimmie ran away."

"Golly! I'm going right back up there and see! Want to come along?"

Without waiting for a second invitation Mrs. Vail drew the old coat which had belonged to her late husband more closely about her and climbed sturdily up over the wheel.

"You come along, too, Jimmie, and show us where you found the man, and if you're telling a story I'll 'tend to you!" she called. "Hurry, now!"

Jimmie scrambled up beside her and Sam turned short in the road and whipped up the horse.

"Who was it?" he asked. "Do you guess he's hurt bad?"

"I dunno. I don't wanna look at him again! I was up there just to—to—um!" Jimmie remembered all at once what he had left in his hurried flight. "Just to hide my skates so's I could get 'em easy after school, an' I seen him with the blood all over!"

Repetition was dulling his fastidious sensibilities, and he amplified his story with evident relish.

"There's an awful lot of blood, Mister Jenks, and he's got his face down in it, like he'd been lyin' there forever. That's the place I went in; there where the hedge is gone!"

He slipped down before the wagon stopped and led

the way through the gap in the hedge, around empty flowerbeds and clumps of skeleton shrubbery, to the artificial pond which lay like a sheet of glass fringed with naked willows.

Just on the edge of the bank, among the stark trees, a figure lay sprawled face downward. The voluminous greatcoat which enveloped it was spread out like the wings of some huge, fallen bird, and the limbs which protruded from beneath the coat were twisted in a manner that would have seemed grotesque save for a certain strange rigidity that lent them dignity, and for the spreading blotch of brown that stained the snow about the spot where the head rested.

Mrs. Vail drew back with a gasp and Jimmie took a gingerly step or two forward, but Sam Jenks advanced to the prone figure and, seizing the shoulders, turned it over with a mighty wrench.

"It's Gilbert Latimer himself, by gosh!" he exclaimed.

"He isn't dead!" Mrs. Vail approached, pushing the reluctant Jimmie aside. "You don't think he's dead, Sam?"

"Dead as a doornail! He's frozen solid! Look where his forehead's all smashed in!" Sam's ruddy countenance had paled, but his eyes snapped with excitement. "Mis' Vail, you run up to the house and tell the folks! No fall on the snow could have stove his head in that way even if there is lumps of ice underneath. I'm going for the constable just as fast as I can get over the road!"

"I wanna go with you! I don't wanna stay here!" wailed Jimmie, unnerved.

"Hitch on, then!" Sam ran for the wagon and called back over his shoulder, "I'll be back in no time, Mis' Vail!"

But Mrs. Vail was already half way across the white expanse of the lawn, ignoring the winding driveway that offered a more devious route to the old Colonial house whose staunch pillars showed between the gnarled gray trunks of the trees which surrounded it.

She hurried up the shallow porch steps and lifted the brass knocker, letting it fall with a clanging jar. It reverberated upon the still, frost-laden air, and as the clamor died away brisk footsteps sounded within and a smug-faced man-servant opened the door.

"Mr. Latimer! He's been hurt! He's lying down by the pond!" Mrs. Vail announced breathlessly.

The butler eyed her disheveled bare head and the rough ulster drawn about her ample form in some disdain.

"Impossible, ma'am!" His tone was calmly aloof. "Mr. Latimer is away—"

"What is it, Bangs?" A clear, flute-like voice sounded from the rear of the hall, and a young woman came forward. She was clad in a violet gown of some soft, clinging material banded with dark fur, and the pale gold of her hair glowed in the shaft of wintry sun which came through the bay window. "Why, you are a neighbor of ours, aren't you?"

"Yes, ma'am," Mrs. Vail stammered. "I live down the road a piece. My little boy found a man lying by your pond, and the milkman says it's Mr. Latimer and that he's—he's hurt bad!"

Somehow she could not say "dead" with those calm

blue eyes gazing into her face, but the agitation in her manner communicated itself to the other woman, and two slim hands flew to the violet-covered breast.

"There must be some mistake! Mr. Latimer went to town last night—!" Mrs. Latimer caught herself up. "Bangs, is Sidney or Henry in the house?"

"Yes, madam. They are both having their breakfast in the kitchen," the butler replied.

"Tell them to go at once and see what the trouble is, and if someone is hurt have him brought to the house," she directed. Then, turning once more to her visitor, she added: "Won't you come into the library and warm yourself? There is a fire there, and you must be cold. It was good of you to run up—"

"But it's Mr. Latimer!" Mrs. Vail burst out. "Aren't you coming to see? He's got on that fur coat I've often seen him drive past in, on his way to the station, and—and Sam Jenks has gone for the constable—"

"The constable!" Mrs. Latimer whispered. The butler had departed upon his errand, and as the two women faced each other Mrs. Vail could see that the other was controlling herself by a visible effort. "Why? Surely you don't mean—!"

"Whoever he is, ma'am, he's dead!" Mrs. Vail cried. "I couldn't tell you right out flat, but he has fallen down or—or been hit on the head with something. There, ma'am, don't!"

For Mrs. Latimer had wavered and clutched at the back of a tall cathedral chair for support. The next instant she had recovered herself and, turning, tore

open the door of a closet beneath the staircase and dragged out a great fur cloak.

"Come!" she breathed as she struggled into it. "Come quickly! You must show me where he was found!"

Her slender fingers felt like bands of steel as she gripped Mrs. Vail's plump arm, and the latter glanced down at her feet.

"You've only got them thin slippers on—!"

"What does it matter?" There was a rising note of hysteria now in the younger woman's tone, and her eyes glowed feverishly. "It cannot be Mr. Latimer, but I must see! I must know!"

As they hastened down the driveway two men hurrying before them disappeared into the thick growth of willows which screened the pond from their view, and a distant shout came from the highroad beyond.

"That's Sam Jenks!" Mrs. Vail panted. "Maybe I hadn't ought to have gotten you out here, Mis' Latimer! Maybe you'd ought to have waited in the house—!"

But Mrs. Latimer had dropped her arm and sped lightly forward, vanishing between the stunted willows, and the other followed, stumbling over the frozen hummocks of snow.

When she reached the scene of the tragedy she found two men standing beside the rigid figure on the ground. One was tall and lanky, with a chauffeur's cap pushed far back on his dark, curly head, and the other of middle age, thick-set and stooping, with his shock of grizzled hair bare to the winds. Mrs. Latimer stood a little apart as though turned to stone,

staring down at the still form, and the snow about her was no whiter than her face.

"Is it—?" Mrs. Vail appealed to the young man with the cap. "Is it Mr. Latimer?"

"It's him all right!" he responded in a stunned fashion. "And I drove him to the station myself last night! God! I feel as if I was seeing things! He's a goner, Henry!"

The thick-set man nodded gravely and turned as a sound of excited masculine voices came from the direction of the highroad and three more men burst through the thicket of shrubbery with the ubiquitous Jimmie in tow.

Sam Jenks led the way, followed by the constable, Wex Price; and a third man brought up the rear, a man whom Mrs. Vail had never seen before. He was a brisk, clean-cut, boyish-looking young man with sparkling blue eyes and just the hint of a scar above one brow; and after the first glimpse of the prone figure he paused in the background, taking in the scene before him with a lightning glance which seemed to miss no detail.

"Jimmie, come here!" Mrs. Vail called peremptorily and then approached the other woman.

"Mis' Latimer, it won't do any good for you to stay here now, you know. They'll bring him up to the house in a few minutes. Do you want me to go back with you? Is there anything I can do?"

Mrs. Latimer shook her head dumbly and wrenched her eyes away from her husband's stark form. They were dry and tearless and very bright, and her blanched lips moved but no sound came from them.

The two latest comers had knelt by the body, and now the constable rose and turned to her, jerking off his moth-eaten seal cap.

"You're Mrs. Latimer?" he asked huskily, his fat face red with excitement and importance. "You identify this—this man as your husband?"

She shuddered and passed one hand over her face.

"Yes. I—" her breath came in a sobbing gasp. "I cannot understand! He left for the city last night. It seems impossible, but it is he!"

"Then I'll ask you to go back to your house, ma'am, and wait there till I come," Constable Price ordered. "You take her, Mrs. Vail, and then see that Jimmie goes home and stays to home! Don't have him gabbing around—"

"But what is it?" Mrs. Latimer interrupted, her gaze returning as though fascinated to the body. "What happened to my husband? Did he fall and strike his head on the ice—?"

"No, ma'am," the constable replied bluntly. "We don't have to wait for the doctor to come and tell us that no ice made that wound! He's been struck on the head by some heavy, sharp instrument. It's murder, ma'am!"

"Catch her!" The strange young man sprang forward, but he was too late, for at the word "murder" Mrs. Latimer had swayed and slipped down with a soft, silken rustle into the snow.

"Here! You let me have her!" The thick-set man strode forward. "I'm Henry Eaves, the gardener; I'll take her up to the house. It's a pity you couldn't have broken it to her a little easier!"

He spoke with rough compassion and, stooping, gathered the slender figure up in his long arms and started for the driveway. His companion prepared to follow, but the constable stopped him.

"You're the chauffeur, ain't you?"

"Sure he is!" Sam Jenks spoke up before the other could reply. "He's been down to my brother's garage more than once since they come here!"

"What's your name?" The constable ignored the interruption.

"Sidney Curry," the other responded. "Gee, this is fierce, isn't it? How'd he get back here? I drove him to the station last night to catch the eight-fifty and left him on the platform with his bag in his hand. He said he'd 'phone out from town and let me know when to meet him today. How d'you s'pose he got back here, and what happened to him? He hasn't been robbed, for there's his stick-pin—"

He halted suddenly, and Constable Price observed:

"So the 'phone's been put in? Well, you go up to the house, Curry, and call up Sheriff Pettingill, Sunny-mead four-six, and Doc Hale, number one-eight. Tell 'em to get right up here, that there's been murder done! How many do the Latimers employ 'round the place, inside and out?"

"Well, there's me and Henry and Bangs, the butler; that's three. Then there's the cook, Virgie, and Ruth, and Mrs. Latimer's own maid, Maggie. That's all now, because the family has just moved in, but the boss was saying only yesterday that he was going to hire two or three more gardeners when the frost breaks, and a mechanic to help me 'round the garage. He'd

bought two new cars, and I guess they expected to entertain a lot this summer—God! Who do you s'pose slugged him like that?"

"That's what I'm here to find out!" the constable retorted. "You hustle up to the house now and get those messages through and tell the butler and the gardener and all the hired girls that I want them there when the sheriff comes."

The chauffeur gave a final dazed glance at the body of his late employer and then hurried off up the drive, and Sam Jenks remarked:

"I could have got the coroner and the sheriff for you just as well, Wex."

"And stopped to tell every last soul on the way!" snapped the constable. "We don't want anybody here tracking up the snow and getting in the way, but I s'pose there'll be a crowd here before we know it!"

"Ain't you going to move him?" asked Sam, with an averted glance at the body.

"Not till the coroner gets here." The constable turned ostentatiously to the young man with the scar. "Didn't expect to run into something right in your own line out here in the country, did you, Mr. Odell?"

Sergeant Barry Odell, of the homicide bureau of the New York Police Department, smiled the sunny Irish smile which had brought him more confidences than the notorious "third degree."

"City or country, it's all the same as long as people think and feel alike and are governed by the same motives," he replied. "I have no business here officially, I know, but I'm glad I came. It's too bad the snow has frozen so solidly in the last four days; if it

were fresh and soft the footprints alone might have told the story, but I don't think our friend here put up much of a fight."

He was nosing about the spot where the body lay, and the other two men watched him curiously.

"Never did take much stock in footprints myself." The constable stamped and beat his hands together softly, for the cold was penetrating. "We've got to find out why Mr. Latimer came back from the station instead of taking his train, and what he was doing here away off from the main drive. Do you s'pose he was knocked on the head somewhere else and carried here?"

Sergeant Odell shook his head.

"No. You can see where his heels cut through the crust on the snow here when he spun half way round and then crumpled and dropped—but I forgot; you don't take any stock in footprints. I wonder what became of his bag."

"What bag?"

"The chauffeur said he left him standing on the station platform with his bag in his hand," Odell reminded the other.

"By George, that's so!" The constable glanced hurriedly about him. "Maybe it was robbery, after all. Maybe somebody was after something he had in that bag! But what do you s'pose he was hit with? It might have been a hatchet, by the looks of that gash in his forehead!"

Mrs. Vail and Jimmie had long since moved off down the road, and Sam Jenks' horse was nibbling patiently at the frosted hedge while Sam himself still stood

gaping in awed fascination at the detective sergeant from the city. Now he roused himself to volunteer a suggestion.

"Couldn't have been that anchor, could it?"

"What anchor?" The constable rounded on him. "I thought you'd gone along on your route, Sam!"

Sam ignored the hint and pointed with a mittened hand to an ice-coated rowboat drawn up on the edge of the pond a few feet away.

"That there. There's a rusted old anchor in the bow of it, and the rope's broke. I saw it while you were talkin' to Mis' Latimer."

"I was going to have a look at that rowboat myself in a minute!" the constable remarked in a vexed tone. "Who's that coming down the road? Land, I s'pose the whole town'll be here before a body can turn around!"

"It's Doc Hale's car!" Sam announced, and he made for the gap in the hedge as the constable turned to the boat. A small anchor lay in the seat at its bow with a few inches of frayed, brittle rope attached to it, and as he picked it up he saw that the tip of one fluke was stained a dull brown over the frost which glazed it.

"Look here, Mr. Odell!" he called. "What do you make of this?"

But he received no answer. Some thirty feet away in a thick clump of holly trees the sergeant was gazing reflectively at something which he had plucked from a thorny, low-hanging branch. It was a tiny fragment of moleskin, a soft, brown bit of fur which had evidently been torn from some garment in passing.

And Mrs. Latimer had worn a moleskin coat!

CHAPTER II

AT A QUARTER PAST NINE

JOHAN PETTINGILL, sheriff of North Shore County, was a long-sparred, cadaverous individual with a stragglng, sandy mustache just tinged with gray and a mild, drawling voice that belied the alert brown eyes and the firm set of his square jaw.

He clambered in a leisurely manner out of the coroner's little red runabout and halted before the excited Jenks.

"What are you doing here, Sam?"

"I found the body! Leastways, Jimmie Vail did, and he told his mother and she stopped me as I was going by!" Sam began breathlessly. "I brought 'em back up here in the milk wagon and we found him lying stiff and stark!"

"Who is it?" the coroner demanded. "Who's dead? A man who called himself 'Bangs' telephoned and said there'd been an accident up here."

"He's the Latimers' servant, and it's Mr. Latimer himself that's dead. Wex Price says it's murder!"

The coroner, who combined the duties of that office with the general medical practice of the village, was an elderly man and not over-agile, but now he turned without further words, and scrambling, with the elasticity of half his years, over the frozen ditch and up the bank beyond, he vanished through the hedge. The sheriff paused.

"You haven't seen anything of Barry Odell, have you, Sam? You know the young man from the city who is visiting me? I wanted to bring him along, but I couldn't find him anywhere."

"You mean that police fellow?" Sam grinned. "He's here already. He was talking with the constable outside the county clerk's office and they both came back with me in the wagon. I went for Wex as soon as I saw the body and turned it over. I'll show you, Sheriff—!"

"Never mind. You'll be no more good on your route for the rest of the morning anyway, Sam, and I want people kept back till we've gone over the ground," the sheriff replied. "I'll deputize you to stand here and order them not to obstruct the road. Better blanket your horse, for there come the first lot!"

A cutter and a ramshackle little car were descending the hill from the direction of the village followed by straggling groups on foot, and Sam Jenks, well pleased with the new importance thrust upon him, took up his stand in the middle of the road while the sheriff turned to the gap in the hedge.

Constable Price met him, anchor in hand, and gave him a voluble account of what had taken place; and at his approach "Doc" Hale rose from beside the body.

"Been dead all night, I guess," he announced briefly. "Eight or ten hours anyway. Fracture of the frontal and left temporal; it must have taken a powerful blow with a sharp-edged implement to produce such a wound."

The sheriff gazed frowningly down at the body.

"Then there's no chance that he fell, striking his forehead?" he asked.

"Not unless he fell from an airplane, and landed on the upturned edge of a plow!" the coroner retorted. "They've got a small station truck up at the house and the body can be brought down this afternoon for the autopsy, but it's murder, all right, John. There's no way Latimer could have done that to himself—Who's this?"

An angular, middle-aged woman had thrust herself through the willows. Without so much as a glance at the body she addressed them.

"Is one of you the doctor? Mrs. Latimer's sick, and Bangs said—"

"I'll go right up with you." Dr. Hale turned. "Wait till I get my bag; it's in the car."

"Who are you?" the sheriff asked.

"I'm Maggie, Mrs. Latimer's maid." The woman still kept her face averted from the rigid form on the ground, and shivered as the biting wind cut through her thin black gown. "Bangs is a coward; he would not stir a foot to save him, and the poor mistress going from one fainting fit to another! Cook's in hysterics and Ruth's packing!"

"Well, she'd better unpack again!" the sheriff observed grimly. "Wex, give me that anchor and go up to the house with this woman and the doctor; see that no one leaves it until I come. Where's Barry Odell?"

"The last I saw of him he was going up that way, where the brook turns by the holly trees," the constable replied. "Look at the tip of that anchor, Sheriff; do you think—?"

"I haven't begun to think yet!" retorted the other. "Mind that not a soul leaves that house!"

As the doctor and constable departed with the maid Barry Odell sauntered into view. Both hands were in his pockets and he was whistling softly to himself, but when he saw the sheriff he hurried forward.

"There you are, John! Hope you don't mind my butting in, but I couldn't resist it when Price asked me. This is bad business, isn't it?"

"Glad to have you here; I was looking for you to bring you along myself," the sheriff responded heartily. "What does it look like to you?"

Odell shrugged.

"Very pretty little problem," he replied. "What do you know of these Latimers?"

"Not much; they're strangers here. This is the old Hopewell place, and they bought it a month or so ago and moved out from the city. Nobody seems to know much about them, and they've kept to themselves."

"How many are there in the family?"

"Only Latimer and his wife, I guess. At least, if there are any children they must be away at school." The sheriff paused. "One or two of the middling people have called, so I heard; families who have left the city and settled here for all the year 'round. The country club bunch and the old inhabitants have both held off because they don't know which crowd they belong to. That's the talk that's gone around, anyway."

"What was Latimer's business?" asked Odell. "Does anybody know?"

"He was a manufacturer of something to do with

airplanes; got offices in New York and went to town every day. Maybe some of the neighbors who take the same commuters' train could give us a line on him if he was inclined to be sociable." John Pettingill pulled at his ragged mustache thoughtfully. "He must have money, for old Hopewell held this place at twenty-five thousand, and I understand it's free and clear of mortgage. Mrs. Latimer's a pretty little woman and he wasn't a bad looker, though quite some years older than her, I guess. Wex Price found this anchor in that old boat there; do you think this is blood on it?"

"I've been looking for that—or something like it!" Odell took the anchor from his friend and scrutinized it closely. "I didn't expect to find blood on it, though. Better have the doctor analyze that brown stuff that's caked on the fluke before the coating of ice underneath melts and washes it off; it's cracked already, you see. Unless we can find something else this rather upsets my calculations, John; that's the trouble with theories, I vow every time that I'll never make 'em, and then no sooner do I get on a new case than I begin to reconstruct it to suit myself!"

He smiled ruefully and the sheriff stared at him.

"What did you think this had been used for, if not to kill Latimer?" he demanded.

"To crack something harder than his skull!" Odell retorted. "I've got a rather curious thing to show you. I suppose you know that Latimer was to have gone to the city last night on the eight-fifty; the chauffeur, Curry, told us that he left him and his bag at the station, and so far that is the last we know of anyone

seeing him. Well, I've found the bag, all right! Come this way."

He led his companion through the cluster of holly trees to where the brook turned before it emptied into the pond. The ice there was thinner and broken by the swift flow of the current beneath, and just at the edge a jagged hole as big as the bulk of a man's torso had been cut through the crust. On the bank lay a tan calfskin week-end bag, sodden and already filmed with ice.

The sheriff's eyes traveled swiftly from it to the hole in the frozen surface of the brook.

"You fished for it down there?" he asked, adding: "You must have, for your arms are wet to the shoulder. Is the brook as deep as that there?"

"Yes. The bank shelves abruptly," Odell responded, glancing down at his coat-sleeves, which glistened with a powdering of frost. "I tried to open the bag, but the lock sticks if it is not fastened, and my fingers were too numb."

"You think whoever dropped it down there may have chopped the hole with the anchor?" Pettingill took it from the other's hand and weighed it reflectively. "It's heavy enough, all right, and the tip of the fluke is sharp. But then, what is the brown stain on it?"

"That's what gets me," Odell admitted frankly. "I've looked all around and there doesn't seem to be anything else in sight that could have been used to break through that ice; of course if that is really frozen blood—!"

He halted and a smile broke once more over his face.

"What is it?" the sheriff inquired curiously.

"Nothing; I'm not sure yet." The younger man

turned away. "I don't believe there is anything more to be done here except to take charge of the valuables on the body. No one has touched it yet but that man Jenks, and he only turned it over, I understand."

They retraced their steps, and the sheriff, kneeling down, removed the scarf-pin from the vivid tie below the still, colorless face and then went rapidly through the pockets, grunting as he shifted the rigid body from side to side to get at those on the hips.

"That's all, I guess; pin, watch and fob, key-ring, wallet, cigar-case, match-box and three-sixty in loose change besides his commutation ticket and this handful of papers," he summed up. "We can look them over at the house and I'll send down to have his body brought up at once."

"There's a ring on his right hand," Odell suggested.

"That's so." The sheriff tugged at it and then shook his head. "Can't get it off. He must have worn it a long time—you can see how the flesh has fattened out around it. Come up to the house now; I want to talk to the servants and to Mrs. Latimer if she is able to be questioned. You carry the bag, Barry, and I'll bring the anchor."

Taking the dead man's silk handkerchief, he spread it over the mutilated face, tucking it behind the head at each side; then, turning, led the way to the drive.

As they approached the house Odell's hand went tentatively to his pocket where reposed that fragment of fur, but he shook his head. While there was the possibility of a simple explanation of its presence on that holly branch he would not speak and prejudice the honest, but somewhat narrow, mind of his friend.

Bangs opened the door for them, and his pasty face went a shade more pale as he recognized the sheriff.

"Mrs. Latimer cannot see anyone, sir!" he began. "This horrible thing has broke her down completely, and the doctor is with her now—!"

"That's all right; it isn't Mrs. Latimer that I want to see just at present," the sheriff interrupted. "I want a statement from everybody in this house, and I'll begin with you. Take us somewhere that we can talk."

The butler hesitated.

"I don't know anything at all about it, sir!" he protested at last. "Mr. Latimer went away last night, and that is the last anybody here heard till that woman came running up to the house."

"Never mind. You'll answer my questions," Pettin-gill said firmly as he placed the anchor on the floor of the porch beside the door. "Have you got an open fire anywhere? My friend's wet through."

The servant's eyes bulged as they rested upon the bag which Odell carried, but he turned without further demur and led the way into a spacious library which opened from the center hall. It was furnished in black walnut of an indeterminate period and hung with gay chintzes, and a wood fire crackled cheerily on the wide hearth.

The sheriff stationed himself with his back to it, while Odell seated himself at one side and spread out his hands to the glowing warmth. Bangs hovered uncertainly on the threshold.

"Come in and shut that door," Pettin-gill ordered. "Now what is your name?"

"Alfred Bangs, sir."

"How long have you worked for the Latimers?"

"Almost a year, sir. Ever since they got back from their wedding trip."

The sheriff darted a swift glance at his companion and then back to the man before him.

"Where did the Latimers live before coming here?"

"In New York. They had an apartment on Madison Avenue." The butler shifted from one foot to the other. "I have the very best of references, sir—"

"Never mind that. How long have the other servants been with the Latimers?"

"Ruth, the housemaid, came the same time I did, but they had three cooks before they got Virgie, six months ago," Bangs replied. "Sidney Curry, the chauffeur, was with Mr. Latimer and Maggie with Mrs. Latimer before ever they were married."

"Those are all in the household except the family?"

"All in the household, sir," the butler repeated and then hesitated. "The chauffeur sleeps in the garage, of course, and then there is Henry Eaves, the gardener."

"He doesn't come from around here," the sheriff remarked.

"No, sir. Mr. Latimer engaged him in town, but I don't know where he came from. He ain't sociable-like at all, but Mrs. Latimer seems well satisfied with him."

There was a sudden significance in his tone which made the sheriff eye him sharply.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"Nothing particular, sir. Mrs. Latimer talks to him a lot, but then he's in full charge of laying out the

grounds for the spring." He paused. "Mr. Latimer was going to put in greenhouses and make extensive improvements, I understand, sir."

"Mr. Latimer was a manufacturer, wasn't he?"

"Yes, sir, of airplanes. He has a factory over in Jersey and another in Connecticut; that's why he's away so much. He liked to drop in at the works when they wasn't expecting him; he was that kind." There was a resentful note in the man's tone but he suppressed it quickly. "He'd start out at a minute's notice, the way he did last night."

"Then he hadn't planned to go to town?"

"I don't think so, sir. At least, I didn't hear him say anything about it to Mrs. Latimer when I was serving dinner—but then, they didn't talk much."

Again there was that odd, significant note in his voice as though he could have added to his statement but discretion held him back.

"Do you mean that they'd quarreled?" the sheriff asked bluntly.

"Oh, no, sir! But Mrs. Latimer is the quiet kind and Mr. Latimer is all for business—was, I should say," Bangs corrected himself. "He was a very positive man with a high temper, if I may say so, but it takes two to quarrel, and Mrs. Latimer never argued any with him."

"What happened yesterday?" Pettingill changed the topic. "Did Mr. Latimer receive any message calling him to town?"

"No, sir. He went in on business in the morning and came out at his usual time; about half past five. I served dinner at seven, and right afterwards he sent

for Sidney and told him to have the car at the door at half past eight, that he was going to town again. Then he and Mrs. Latimer came in here to this very room and shut the door and talked. I was busy putting the silver away, but when Sidney brought the car around Mr. Latimer went upstairs himself and got his bag and I helped him on with his coat at the door. Mrs. Latimer didn't come out of the library until after he had gone, and then she went right up to her room."

"Did you see her again last night?"

The butler hesitated once more.

"No, sir. She told me as she went upstairs that she wouldn't need anything more during the evening, but she must have gone out somewhere."

"Gone out!" the sheriff repeated.

"Yes, sir. At least, she wasn't in her own rooms a little while after, and I couldn't find her anywhere in the house. I was in the pantry a little after nine when I heard the telephone ring. It was a New York call for Mrs. Latimer, and I went up and knocked and knocked at her door, but I couldn't get any answer; the extensions haven't been put in yet, and there is only the one 'phone over there on the writing table. I looked in Mr. Latimer's rooms and all over downstairs, but there wasn't any sign of her; so I went back and told the party she was not here."

"Do you know who the party was?" Pettingill asked after a second glance toward his friend. Odell was staring into the fire, however, and seemed lost in thought.

"Yes, sir. It was Miss Agnew, Miss Doris Agnew. She is Mrs. Latimer's best friend."

"You told Mrs. Latimer of the message this morning? What did she say?"

"I told Maggie, but she declared that Mrs. Latimer had gone straight to her room and to bed!" Bangs sniffed. "I knew better, for I'd knocked loud enough to wake the dead, but there's no use trying to talk to that person! I've been on the point of giving notice more than once on her account. I've been boss wherever I've worked before and looked up to by the other servants, but that Maggie thinks she can run everything because Mrs. Latimer spoils her!"

"Did Miss Agnew leave any message?"

"No, sir. She just said for Mrs. Latimer to call her up today."

"You say this telephone call came a little after nine?"

"It must have been only two or three minutes after, sir, for I was a good while knocking at Mrs. Latimer's door and looking in the other rooms; and when I finally gave it up and went back to tell Miss Agnew I took note of the time from the clock on the mantel just behind you, so that I could report when the call was made. It was exactly a quarter past nine."

CHAPTER III.

THE CALFSKIN BAG

THERE were a few rather interesting points in that conversation," Odell commented as the butler withdrew.

"I didn't get 'em if there were," the sheriff confessed. "The man's too darned careful in what he says to suit me."

"That's what made it interesting." Odell smiled. "We may have this much, anyway, that may or may not be of value: he and Mrs. Latimer's own maid are at sword's point because he's jealous of her influence over their mistress. The Latimers have only been married a year and they're tired of each other already, or there's a rift in the lute somewhere."

"How do you make that out?"

"I've seen Mrs. Latimer. She is an extraordinarily pretty woman, and a man wouldn't neglect her for his business, or to try to pick quarrels with her, as Bangs insinuated, if everything was well between them. That man meant more than he was willing to explain when he spoke of Henry Eaves, the gardener; it was he who carried Mrs. Latimer up to the house when she fainted, you know. She has two loyal servants, anyway—I don't think Bangs wholly approved of either his master or mistress. Did you get what he said about Latimer being the kind to like to surprise the workers in his

factories when they didn't expect him, and about his high temper? I shouldn't wonder if Latimer had been a hard task-master; he looked like a ruthless, domineering sort of fellow, even in death."

"That's all just servants' gossip," Pettingill declared. "The one thing of any importance seems to me to be that Mrs. Latimer could not be found last night at a quarter past nine."

A light, flurried tapping at the door intervened before Barry Odell could reply, and a pretty, rather vacuous-looking woman appeared. A lock of her hair had strayed down on her collar, and her apron was askew. She straightened it with trembling fingers as she raised frightened eyes to those of the sheriff.

"You sent for me, sir? I'm Ruth Oliver, the housemaid, but indeed I don't know anything—"

"Nobody does!" Pettingill interrupted brusquely. "You've worked for the Latimers for the past year, haven't you?"

"A year come next month. It's only the second place I was ever in, and to think of a terrible thing like this—" She put a corner of her apron to her eyes. "I want to go back to my sister's just as soon as ever I can! I wouldn't be here now only that horrid constable made me stay!"

"Did you like it well enough before this happened?" Odell leaned forward suddenly and his tone was sympathetic.

"Well, sir, it was all right in town, for there wasn't much to do and I could go out evenings." The girl turned with relief to the younger man. "It's different with a big house like this, and then I never did like the

country; you can't even get to a picture show from here unless Mr. Latimer lets Sid take one of the cars. Not that it's a hard place to work in, but it gets on my nerves. Mrs. Latimer always going around as quiet as a mouse and nobody ever knowing when Mr. Latimer was going to blow up!"

"He had a bad temper, then?" The sheriff had moved aside and Odell continued the interrogation.

"Oh, dreadful, sir!" Ruth shivered. "It wasn't often that he got angry, but when he did you'd like to've died from fright!"

"Was he ever violent? I mean, did he ever hurt anybody?"

"N—no, sir, not that I know of, but he looked almost as though he could!" she stammered. "He's dead now and I suppose I ought not to say anything."

The young man pondered for a moment and then asked:

"Did the Latimers entertain very much?"

"Not out here yet; they've only just been getting things in order. But in town they did, now and again."

"Did they go out frequently?" Odell persisted.

"Yes, at first, to theaters and things. Not often lately, though, except to dinner at one of the big restaurants or hotels with somebody Mr. Latimer had business with."

"And it was Mr. Latimer's business associates that they entertained in their own home?"

The girl nodded.

"I guess so. Most of the talk that I heard was about business. They didn't seem to have many real inti-

mate friends, and I don't think Mrs. Latimer cares very much for society."

"Do you know a Miss Doris Agnew?"

"Yes, sir. She is a great friend of Mrs. Latimer—." Ruth paused in some confusion, and Odell asked quickly:

"You knew that she telephoned last night?"

"Not until this morning, sir. I heard Bangs and Maggie having an argument about it."

"Did you know that Mr. Latimer started for the city last evening?"

"Yes, sir. I was upstairs turning the beds down for the night when he came up for his bag; that bag there, sir!" She pointed to the hearth. "He must have been in an awful hurry at the last minute."

"Why?"

"Because he threw things all around, and he's usually real neat about his belongings."

"Did he seem real angry about anything?" Odell saw a faint flush creep up over the girl's face, and she shook her head.

"No, sir. I was tidying up his dressing-room, and he was in the bedroom packing; he stamped around a lot, but once I heard him laughing to himself. Then I went on into Mrs. Latimer's room."

"Do you know when she retired last night?"

"Well, she went up to her rooms just as I was going down; I passed her on the stair a few minutes after I heard the car go off down the drive." The girl began to finger her apron nervously. "She said 'good night' to me and I didn't see her any more after that. Sid Curry had promised to take me to the movies in the

village, but Mr. Latimer's needing him to drive to the station put an end to that, and there wasn't anything else to do, so I took a book and went to my room early. I—I sleep at the top of the house, and—my windows look out over the pond."

She added the last remark in a low, constrained tone. The sheriff uttered a surprised exclamation under his breath, but Odell asked quietly:

"There is something you want to tell us? You saw or heard something from your windows last night?"

She nodded and her color deepened.

"I don't know whether I ought to speak of it or not. I've never been mixed up in anything like this before, but I guess I had better tell you about it—though I—I couldn't swear to anything."

"Go on," Odell urged as she hesitated. "We aren't asking you to swear to anything."

"I looked out of my window when I first went upstairs and saw the lights of the car and heard it going along the drive and around to the garage, and then the house got all dark and everything was terrible still. I couldn't read nor sleep, either, I was so lonesome and blue, and after a while I got up and sat by the window again. There was no moon, but the stars were out and the snow kind of lighted everything up; it was awful dreary! I could see the pond shining like a piece of glass over the tops of the willows, and all at once I heard a shout from down that way; not a loud shout, but there was something about it that brought my heart in my mouth!"

"Do you know what time this was?" The sheriff could keep silent no longer.

"N—no, sir! I don't know how long I had been sitting there; it seemed like a dreadful long time, but it may have been only a few minutes. When I heard that shout I opened my window and wrapped the quilt from my bed around me and waited; but I didn't hear anything more and I was getting chilled through. I was just going to shut my window again when I saw a tiny light moving down among the willows."

"What kind of a light?" the sheriff demanded.

Ruth stared.

"How should I know, sir? It winked like a big fire-fly, but it wasn't going out, just moving behind the trees. Then it stopped almost steady for about five minutes, it seemed to me, and finally went out altogether. I was nearly froze when I shut my window and went back to bed."

"Was that all you saw, just a moving light?" Pettingill bent forward earnestly. "Think! Did you see anybody sneaking around down there?"

The girl averted her eyes from his gaze.

"No, sir. I couldn't have been sure if I had, for there was enough wind last night to blow the branches of the trees about and the shadows were changing on the snow all the time. I—I don't want to spend another night in this house!"

"Did anything else happen last night?"

"I don't know, sir. I went to sleep then. Everything seemed just the same this morning till Virgie came tearing up while I was making Mrs. Latimer's bed, saying that a strange woman had come to the

house with the news that something was wrong down at the pond, and Henry and Sid had gone to see about it. I thought right away of that cry I'd heard in the night, but I never connected it with Mr. Latimer, of course, thinking he was in town, until they brought Mrs. Latimer home."

"Were you there when they brought her in?"

"Yes, sir. Henry was carrying her, and she looked like death! They took her straight up to her room, and I would have helped, but Maggie wouldn't let me get near her. She sent me back to the kitchen, and Virgie was going on so that I got to crying, too!— Please, can I go to my sister's in town? I just can't stand it here!"

"Not till after the inquest," the sheriff replied sternly. "You go tell the constable I want to see him and then send Virgie in here."

Ruth departed, weeping afresh, and Pettingill turned to his young colleague.

"What do you think of that cry she heard and the moving light? Why didn't the fool look at her clock? I should like to know. That would have pretty near fixed the time of the murder."

"I'm not so sure." Odell shook his head. "She may have imagined all that, you know. The contents of this bag may tell us something as soon as it is thawed out sufficiently for the catch to work."

The constable entered at that juncture followed by the coroner, and the former was dispatched to see that the body was brought to the house.

"I'll be getting on myself," Dr. Hale observed as the door closed behind Wex Price. "There's nothing

more for me to do here. Don't excite Mrs. Latimer any more than you have to, for she is on the verge of a mental collapse."

"How has she taken it?" the sheriff asked. "Is she still faint or hysterical?"

The coroner shook his head.

"No. She is quite calm and a little dazed, but she realizes what has happened all right and she seems to be forcing herself to keep up by sheer will-power. The breakdown is sure to come, but she is fighting against it with all her strength. Let her off as easy as you can today, John; I want her at the inquest sure."

"I'll remember," Pettingill promised. "Come outside; I want to show you something."

He led the coroner out to the porch where he had left the anchor, but Odell did not follow. Instead, he stooped and examined every inch of the bag at his feet, and as he lifted it experimentally once more a low whistle escaped him.

It was drowned in a lugubrious gulp from the hall, and an exceedingly fat female figure filled the doorway, her round brown face shining from recent tears.

"Is yo' askin' fo' me, boss? Dat constable man done lock me in mah own kitchen 'twell now, an' I cert'n'y gwine fix him fo' it when I lay mah han's on him! Who done kill Mistuh Lat'mer?"

"You are Virgie, the cook?" asked Odell.

"Name Virginia Jefferson!" she responded with dignity. Then her emotions got the better of her once more and her ample form swayed from side to side. "Lawdy! what has done come to dis yere house?"

Mistuh Lat'mer gone an' got hisse'f killed an' po' Mis' Lat'mer scared clean outen her haid! How come you-all ain't grab de murd'rer?"

"Give us a little time!" Odell smiled good naturedly. "You've been with the family for six months, haven't you?"

"Yassuh! Ain't never wu'ked fo' a nicer lady dan Mis' Lat'mer, but dat gemman cert'n'y got his come-uppance at las'! He was fine an' free-handed, but presents don' make up fo' ha'd words, an' he had de worstest dispersition ever I see! She held her haid high, but he didn't treat her right, suh; he didn't treat nobody right, an' I calls it de Lord's jedgment on him!"

"Do you know of any enemies Mr. Latimer had?" Odell eyed her closely.

"Don'no nothin' 'bout no enemies, but I reckon he did have, suh. It's Mis Lat'mer I been cryin' fo', but I don' guess she gwine grieve when she gets oveh de fust of it. I seen enuff from mah kitchen to know dat he wasn' fitten to wipe her shoes."

"Do you mean that Mrs. Latimer was unhappy? That Mr. Latimer ill-treated her?" Odell spoke hurriedly, for he heard the sheriff's returning footsteps.

"'Unhappy?'" Virgie snorted. "Ain't I seen her jest er-fadin' ever sence I come? She's pretty an' young an' sweet, but he act like she wasn' on earth, or else he was hollern' at her, an' wust! I aims to min' mah own bus'ness in dis worl', but de nex' time yo' see her, boss, yo' jest look at her wris'! Dat's all I is got to say—jest look at her wris'! Whoever done fit wid him down by de pon' mus' of had good reason, an' dat's de truf!"

The sheriff appeared in the doorway at this moment and took a hand in the proceedings, but he succeeded in eliciting little further information. Virgie had cleaned up her kitchen the night before and gone straight to bed. She had known nothing of Mr. Latimer's ostensible departure for town until the morning, and the first intimation she had had of trouble was when Bangs interrupted the breakfast of Henry and Sid with the story of someone being hurt out by the pond. She hoped to die where she stood if she knew anything about Mr. Latimer's death.

When she had been dismissed with the injunction to send in the chauffeur, they caught a glimpse through the closing door of Maggie's angular figure going rapidly down the hall. There was something almost furtive in the manner in which she slipped past, and the sheriff turned to his companion.

"Did you see that maid of Mrs. Latimer's just now? Think I'll call her in; she ought to know more about Latimer's affairs than any of the other servants—"

"I wouldn't," Odell cautioned. "It might be worth while to find out where she is going; she certainly didn't want us to see her just then. You get Curry's story out of him. I'll be back in a minute!"

He opened the door softly and disappeared while the sheriff paced the floor thoughtfully. He had an abiding faith in his young friend who had made so brilliant a record for himself in the metropolitan police department; yet he favored more direct methods himself, and a theory was gradually forming in his mind.

"I'm here, sir." The chauffeur's voice sounded from

the doorway. "I s'pose you want my pedigree. I've been with Mr. Latimer for six years except my time in camp and overseas. He said I was a fool to go, but he took me back, all right. I can't tell you anything about what happened last night. I left him at the station and that's all I know."

"No, it isn't!" the sheriff retorted. "Who did you drive for before you came to Mr. Latimer?"

"Nobody. I was always a nut about machinery and gasoline engines in particular, and I got a job in Mr. Latimer's factory. He only had one then, over in Jersey. He found me there and took a liking to me, and I've been driving for him ever since except when I told you." Curry spoke slowly as though still in a daze, and an unaccustomed pallor showed beneath the freckles which covered his countenance. "It wasn't everybody could get along with him, but I did, and he treated me fine!"

"You were with him, then, before he was married?"

"Sure. He didn't even know Mrs. Latimer when I enlisted, and I came back to find him engaged and going to be married in a week. Gee! You could have bowled me over with a hard look! I never thought the boss would get hooked. He was a sport for fair, and crazy about his plant, too. Those airplanes were like living things to him, and he wanted to make them the best in the world. I can't believe he's dead yet! I ain't got over seeing him lying there—!"

"You drove him to the station yesterday as usual and met him at half past five last night?"

Curry nodded and passed his hand over his forehead.

"Sure I did! He was telling me going down in the morning that the new model was nearly ready, and he was full of plans for trying it out."

"How was he when you met him in the afternoon?" the sheriff asked. "The same as usual?"

"About!" A faint grin appeared for an instant on the chauffeur's face. "He was cussing out the train service, and the ice in the road, and the cigar lighter that wouldn't work, but I knew his ways and didn't bother. I just thought something must have gone wrong during the day, and I drove as fast as—well, it's a good thing your constable didn't see me! I took out the light roadster as he'd told me instead of the limousine, and I can tell you she bounced so I could hardly keep her in the road, but Mr. Latimer kept cussing at me to get more speed out of her. I came near running a man down, though, and he let up on me after that."

"He didn't say anything to you then about going back to the city last night?"

"No. It must have given him a turn when that man jumped out of the ditch right in our path; it did me, and I've had some narrow squeaks," Sidney Curry replied. "He stood there for a minute right in the glare of the lamps, then he threw up one arm and shouted something as he jumped aside just in time. Mr. Latimer turned and stared after him, and I guess he forgot to say anything to me about last night. For

Bangs came to me after dinner and said I was to have the car around at the door at half past eight."

"Did he seem upset in any way when you drove him to the station for the last time?"

"No. He didn't speak at all on the way down except to ask me if I'd noticed that man in the road that afternoon; if I'd seen his face. He said he ought to be prosecuted for not keeping to the sidewalk and that he wished I'd run him down, but that was just talk! Mr. Latimer was all right if you knew how to take him."

"Did you see the man's face?" Odell had been listening on the threshold and now he came forward. "Would you know him again if you saw him?"

"No. He was smooth-faced, and he didn't nave any overcoat on; that's as much as I could tell about him, and I wouldn't know him again if I fell over him," the chauffeur responded. "Mr. Latimer's train wasn't due for some minutes when I got him to the station, and I left him on the platform."

"You sleep over in the garage, don't you?" Odell asked before the sheriff could speak.

"Yes, but it happened that I didn't last night." The young man's dazed tone had quickened. "I drove straight home from the station and found Henry, the gardener, in the garage. He isn't much of a talker, but he often comes out for a smoke with me. He helped me to put up the car, and then he asked me to come to his room to look over some catalogues he'd got of a new road-grader and lawn-roller and some other machinery to use on the place. He sleeps in

the right wing of the house, you know. We talked late, and the upshot of it was that I spent the night there with him."

"Where is the right wing? Toward the pond?"

"No. It's on the other side of the house." Curry looked his surprise. "Say, you ain't trying to make out that we had anything to do with what happened to Mr. Latimer, are you?"

His tone was suddenly truculent, but Odell smiled disarmingly.

"No, Sid. I was just wondering if you heard anything during the night, or saw anyone out there under the trees." He gave the sheriff a warning glance and added: "That will do for now, but stick around; we may want you again."

"Well, you'll find me right here!" The chauffeur turned to the door. "I'm not going to run away! I'd like to have a crack at the guy that killed Mr. Latimer myself!"

"Did you find Maggie?" the sheriff demanded when Curry's footsteps had died away down the hall. "What was she doing?"

"Talking to the gardener. We'd better have a talk with him ourselves later, but first I want to see if we can't open the bag.—Do you see this? I didn't notice it myself until while you were out on the porch with the coroner. It's a wonder the handle didn't break while I was carrying it up to the house."

He pointed to the leather handle, and his companion saw that one side of it was wrenched almost from its fastening.

"Looks as though there had been a fight for it," the latter commented. "Do you think it is locked?"

"No. It's just frozen fast, that's all." Odell was working with slender, nervous fingers at the catch. "There is comes! What a mess!"

The bag yawned open suddenly, disclosing toilet articles and clothing in a disordered, sodden heap. The detective removed them one by one and spread them on the floor about him while the sheriff watched with puzzled eyes.

"What are you doing that for, Barry?" he asked at last. "Of course the things were shaken up considerably from being dumped in the brook and all, but I don't think you'll find anything there that will give us a line on the case."

"No, I won't, because someone else has been before me," Odell retorted. "Whether he found what he was looking for or not I don't know, but this bag has been searched all right. Look at that toothbrush-holder and soap-case and razor-box; open, every one! Even the pockets of the pajama jacket have been turned inside out.—Yes, by Jove, I do know that whoever went through this bag found what he was looking for because the body itself wasn't disturbed after it fell, or the things in its pockets! John, we've got to find out what Latimer carried in this bag!"

CHAPTER IV.

A BIT OF BROWN FUR

TOGETHER they gathered up the miscellaneous articles scattered on the floor and returning them to the bag thrust it for the time being beneath the davenport in a corner, just as a footstep sounded on the bare floor of the hall outside and the stairs creaked.

Odell opened the door and caught the middle-aged maid, Maggie, midway the ascent.

"Just a moment, please," he said authoritatively. "Doctor Hale has assured us that Mrs. Latimer is able to see us now, and we would like a word with her."

The woman's sharp, acidulous face hardened.

"What does he know? A country doctor!" There was ineffable scorn in her words. "Mrs. Latimer can't see anybody, and I'm not going to have her bothered!"

"Come down here!" the sheriff ordered. "I want to ask you a few questions."

Unwillingly enough the woman obeyed and stood defiantly before him.

"Well, what is it? I suppose you're bound to potter around and ask a lot of fool questions, but I ought to be with Mrs. Latimer right now! She shouldn't be left alone for a minute!"

"What's your last name?" He cut short her flow of protestation.

"Ruggles. I've been with Mrs. Latimer for sixteen years."

"Who was she before she was married? Where does she come from?"

"She was Miss Margery Fairfield, of Fairfield Harbor, Massachusetts," Maggie replied loftily. "Fourteen years old she was when I first went to take care of her, and I ain't been away from her for a day since!"

"Has she any relatives she would like to have sent for?" Odell suggested.

"She hasn't a relation in the world. Her mother died when she was born, and her father was in business in Boston and lived at a club there until his death ten years ago. Mrs. Latimer lived with her aunt, Miss Peabody, in the house that's been in the Fairfield family since witchcraft days." Maggie paused and added: "I lived on a farm a few miles away, and I've known about her all my life."

"Miss Peabody is dead also?"

The woman nodded.

"Twelve years ago, when Miss Fairfield—Mrs. Latimer—was eighteen. I took care of the house and her, too, after that."

"How long has Mrs. Latimer lived in New York?"

"Only since her marriage. She visited the Agnews there before; that's how she met Mr. Latimer."

"Who are the Agnews?" Odell continued as the sheriff made no move to assume command of the interrogation.

"City folks' who built a big country place up near Fairfield Harbor." Maggie clipped her words short.

"I don't see what all this has got to do with Mr. Latimer's death! He probably fell down and cut his head open on the ice, and why there should be such a to-do—!"

"Miss Doris Agnew, who telephoned last night, was one of that family?" Odell interrupted her brusquely.

"Yes. There's only her and her brother left. I don't know what she wanted; Mrs. Latimer was in bed and asleep when she called up."

Maggie volunteered the last statement with an aggressiveness which challenged doubt, and Odell observed:

"The butler says that he knocked loudly and repeatedly at Mrs. Latimer's door and he is sure she could not have been there or she would have heard him."

[The woman's gray eyes snapped.

"Bangs is a fool! He'll go packing now, thank goodness, as soon as Mrs. Latimer begins to take hold of things again! We've had enough and to spare of his sneaking ways, but Mr. Latimer found him useful."

She stopped suddenly, biting her lips, and Odell asked quickly:

"How 'useful'? In what way?"

"How would any pussyfoot butler be useful that knew how to mix drinks?" she sniffed. "Mr. Latimer has got his cellar stocked up for five years to come! Bangs has been dipping into it, too, on his own account, I'll be bound, and that's what was the matter with him last night if you ask me. Mrs. Latimer had a headache, and as soon as Mr. Latimer left for the city she went upstairs. I put her to bed myself, and she went

fast asleep almost at once. If Bangs did go up and knock at her door he must have given it just one tap and then gone back to the telephone and said that she was out; he isn't one to give himself any extra trouble!"

"Has Mr. Latimer any relatives who should be notified of his death?" Odell changed the subject.

"No one that I ever heard of, at least in this country. He was an Englishman, and I never heard him talk of his people, but Mrs. Latimer would know, of course."

Odell rose and glanced toward the sheriff.

"We will go to her now," he said in a manner which brooked no further opposition. "We will not annoy her any more than is necessary, but there are some facts we must learn that only she can tell us."

"Come, then." Maggie shrugged and turned to the door. "I'll ask you to remember, though, that she's in no state to be worried, and if she's down sick in her bed you folks will be to blame."

She led the way up the stairs and to a door at the front of the house which she opened softly; and Odell marveled at the gentle note in her voice.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Latimer, but the men are here that the constable sent for; the sheriff, and a young man with him. They say they've got to see you—"

"Of course, Maggie," Mrs. Latimer's low, clear tones replied without a tremor. "It is quite all right; let them come in."

They found her lying on a couch drawn up by a window which looked out over the snow-covered hills to

the bay, and her figure seemed pathetically small and helpless in the dull gray house-gown which swathed it; but her delicate face was perfectly composed as she nodded slightly and gestured to two chairs.

"You wished to see me, gentlemen? I shall be glad to give you any assistance in my power, but you can realize that the shock has almost prostrated me."

"I understand, and we are sorry to intrude upon you at such a time—but every moment is of value in an investigation of this sort." Odell smiled deprecatingly. "This is Sheriff Pettingill, of North Shore County, and I am a friend who is temporary associated with him. My name is Barry Odell. We have been interviewing your maid Maggie in order to spare you as much routine detail as possible, but there are a few questions which the sheriff must ask you."

"I will tell you anything I know," she replied. "But first are you positive that my husband was — was killed? Is there no possibility that he fell and injured himself?"

"None, ma'am," the sheriff asserted gravely. "He was struck down face to face and we've got the weapon that was used."

"You have the—the weapon?" She half raised herself on her pillows and her voice had sunk to a mere whisper. "Oh, what was it?"

"That'll all come out at the inquest," Pettingill replied firmly. "First of all, isn't there someone who ought to be notified? Your girl says that Mr. Latimer hadn't any relations in this country, but there's his

attorney and his business associates. Did he have any partners?"

"Of course! How stupid of me!" She passed a slim hand across her eyes. "My brain seems to be numb, I cannot think; I cannot even seem to feel! Lefferts and Crewe on Broad Street, New York, are our attorneys. They must be sent for at once. Mr. Latimer owned the controlling stock in his company, but the next principal stockholder should be notified, and the directors. If you will get Lefferts and Crewe on the telephone they will attend to all the details. I—I do not feel that I can talk to them, but please ask if Mr. Crewe can come out to me."

"I will do so." The sheriff shifted somewhat uneasily in his chair. "Mrs. Latimer, I hope you will be perfectly frank with us and remember you are not accusing anybody in replying to our questions. It is up to us to find out who committed this crime and personal opinion cannot make an innocent person guilty. Had Mr. Latimer any enemies that you knew of?"

She raised her eyes steadily to his.

"What manufacturer controlling the destinies of hundreds of workmen and struggling with relentless competition has not, in these times?" she asked calmly. "There have been strikes and all sorts of trouble at the factories, and Mr. Latimer's life has frequently been threatened, I believe, but he only laughed at the thought of danger. I really know very little of his business affairs; he did not believe that a wife should have any share in that side of her husband's existence, and it was only through others that I have learned of

the threats which had been made against him. I begged him to carry a pistol, but he ridiculed the idea.—I really can tell you nothing definite, but perhaps Mr. Crewe—”

Her voice trailed off into silence, and after a time the sheriff prompted her.

“Was it this lawyer, Mr. Crewe, who told you of the threats against your husband?”

“Oh, no. When we—we were engaged, Mr. Latimer took me over his factories, and it was the superintendent in one and a foreman in the other who mentioned them. They were made by ignorant workmen and strike delegates, I understand.”

“When I spoke of enemies, Mrs. Latimer, I did not mean only in a business way,” Sheriff Pettingill said slowly. “Had he any personal enemies? Was there anyone who would have benefited by his death or who could have wished him out of their path?”

Her eyes grew larger till they seemed to swallow up the small face, and her hands clenched among the soft folds of her gown. For a moment there was silence in the room, and her quickly drawn breath was plainly audible. Then she replied hurriedly:

“I do not understand! My husband and I were alone in the world. Who could have wished him out of the way? He was a man’s man, and had many friends. No one could have benefited by his death, and there is no one to step into his shoes at the manufacturing plants. He was a comparatively young man, just forty-two, and had built up his business solely by his

own efforts. They may have been considered ruthless, but most things are in life; and I—I do not believe that he ever consciously hurt anybody.”

Even as she spoke she flung out her hands in a little gesture as of one warding off a blow, and the dainty lace frills fell away from about her slender wrists, disclosing faint purplish marks. Odell recalled the words of Virgie, the cook, and a wave of compassion swept over his consciousness; but he put it sternly from him and his eyes sought a chair by the door, beyond her range of vision, across which had been carelessly thrown the moleskin coat in which she had appeared at the scene of the tragedy. Under what pretext could he examine it?

“Is there no one else you wish sent for besides your lawyer?” The sheriff leaned toward her in a kindly manner. “No woman friend, Mrs. Latimer? I understand that the lady who telephoned to you last night, Miss Agnew, was your most intimate friend—”

“Oh, no!” The figure upon the couch had started up with a cry in which there was something akin to terror; then with an effort she controlled herself. “I mean, Miss Agnew is my friend, of course, and that is just why I do not want her sent for!—I shall be all right with Maggie to take care of me, and I would not think of dragging anyone else into this terrible affair. I must go through with it alone!”

Her eyes had wandered from his face out through the window over the dreary monotony of the white, undulating hills and seemed to gather something of

strength, for their clear depths were unmarred by a shadow as she turned once more to the sheriff and spoke quietly.

"My husband was a man of moods, Mr. Pettingill, and although he was a dominant person he permitted himself to be swayed by impulses. That is why it would be difficult for even me to tell whether anything out of the ordinary had been on his mind of late; that is what you wish to ask me, is it not?"

The sheriff nodded, and she went on:

"Neither he nor I cared very much for society. I was brought up quietly in the country and my tastes are simple, while he has been too utterly engrossed in his business to cultivate the social graces. He was—primitive, in a way." She spoke in a curiously detached, impersonal tone. "We have lived in town since our marriage, and I found it confining; that is why we purchased this place. It made little difference to Mr. Latimer where we lived as long as it was within a reasonable distance midway between his two factories. It has been a dream of his to develop a new model, small, light, cheap plane, really a taxi of the air, and he seemed in a fair way to realize it. He has been full of his plans for weeks, and since we moved out here I have seen comparatively little of him. He came out over the last week-end, but spent Monday night in town, and last night he made up his mind quite suddenly to take a run out to the Jersey plant."

"He did not intend to do so when he returned from town late in the afternoon?"

"I don't think so. At least, he said nothing about it

during dinner. I—I had a headache, and I am afraid I was not very good company. He grew restless and began thinking of some detail which should be attended to at the factory early in the morning. After dinner he followed me into the library and told me that he had decided to go in on the eight-fifty to see some man at his hotel and remain in the city overnight, so as to make an early start today to the plant.'

"Who was the man he expected to see, and what hotel did he stop at?"

"Really, I can't tell you. It was no one I knew, no one whose name I had ever heard before, and it made no impression on me." She put out her hands once more in the little helpless gesture which was now becoming familiar. "I have told you that Mr. Latimer from the first discouraged any interest I might have had in his business, and I had grown inattentive when he mentioned details."

"You say that your husband frequently remained in town overnight since you came out here to live, Mrs. Latimer." The sheriff hitched his chair closer. "Where did he stay? At a club, or a hotel, or with some friends?"

A faint flush crept up over her colorless face.

"At—at a hotel," she faltered. "He had no favorite one which he patronized, but he was fond of changing about."

"So that you could not have located him at night if anything had gone wrong out here?" Pettingill pursued with brutal directness.

"It never occurred to either of us that anything

might." The flush deepened painfully and she bit her lip, but replied with a sudden return of animation. "I have had no occasion to summon him."

"Can you think of any reason why Mr. Latimer should have returned from the station last night?"

Mrs. Latimer shook her head.

"I have been asking myself that question over and over," she said. "I can only think that he must have forgotten something, some paper or memorandum, which he would require in the morning. But that does not explain why he walked back from the station when there were conveyances of all sorts to be had, nor how he came to be down there by the pond, so far from the drive. I cannot understand! It may be that he saw someone prowling about and went to investigate, but he would not have walked home unless he had suddenly decided to abandon his trip to the city until today. Ever since I regained consciousness these questions have been beating at my brain until it seems that I must go mad!"

Her voice had at last risen beyond the calm, level, controlled tones, and at the warning note of hysteria in it the sheriff arose. Odell had been watching her closely, however, and now he stepped forward.

"Just one question, Mrs. Latimer, and then we will trouble you no longer at this time," he said. "You remember when Mrs. Vail came this morning with the news of what her little son had found down by the pond? You sent Henry and Sidney down first to investigate, did you not, and then you decided to go yourself, and Mrs. Vail accompanied you?"

"Yes." Mrs. Latimer fastened her gaze upon him questioningly.

"How did you go from the house here? Straight across the lawn or on the drive?"

"Why, I scarcely remember!" She paused. "Down the drive, I think, until we came opposite the willows which border the pond, and then across. I was intent only on reaching there as quickly as possible to see for myself who had been hurt, and that was the most direct way."

"Then you did not go near the brook where it empties into the pond?" Odell's tone was casual, but the sheriff started and stared at him in sudden wonder.

"No. I—I'm quite sure I did not go near the brook." Mrs. Latimer's reply was uttered in a faint voice, but her eyes still held his as though fascinated. "Why do you ask, Mr. Odell?"

"We have been locating the footprints as well as we were able on the frozen crust of the snow," he explained. "We thought we had found some of yours leading to that clump of holly trees, but we must have been mistaken. They were so faint that nothing conclusive could have been drawn from them, anyway. Good morning, Mrs. Latimer. I hope that our interview has not disturbed you, and that you will be able to get a little rest."

He bowed and turned to the door, but as he passed he reached out quickly and caught up the moleskin coat.

The sheriff followed him out into the hall and closed the door carefully behind him.

"We're almost through here now," he announced as they went downstairs. "What do you think of her, Barry?—Hello, what are you doing with that coat?"

"I'll show you in a minute." Odell led the way back to the library once more and spread the coat out over a huge chair. At one side of the front, a few inches from the bottom, a long rent appeared in the soft, fine, perishable fur.

"What the—?" The sheriff paused as Odell drew from his pocket the fragment of moleskin which had reposed there for the past hour, and fitted it into the gaping tear.

"I found this clinging to one of the lower branches of a low-growing holly tree in that clump where the brook flows into the pond," he explained. "It was only a few feet from the bank where the bag had been submerged. I didn't speak of this before, John, because I did not want you to jump to conclusions while there was a chance for her to explain."

"Good Lord!" The sheriff stared once more. "Barry, you don't mean—!"

"I mean that unless Mrs. Latimer can prove that she or someone else wore that coat down among those holly trees within the last day or two,—for you can see that the tear is a fresh one,—we had better take it along with us as Exhibit A. Bangs may not have been mistaken, after all, when he knocked at her door last night!"

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN AT THE STATION

"I'M GOING back upstairs and face her with this now!" Sheriff Pettingill started for the door, but Odell laid a quick, restraining hand upon his sleeve.

"And lay your trump card on the table at this time?" He took the moleskin coat and the fragment of fur from the hands of the excited official. "Mrs. Latimer doesn't even know that the coat was torn and that tell-tale bit of evidence left behind; why forewarn her? She might easily claim that she went out for a walk about the grounds in that coat yesterday or the day before and wandered down by the pond, and that maid Maggie would go the limit in corroborating her whether her statement was true or false. You'll have to have proof that she wasn't there at any other time lately before you can spring this, John. Taken with the butler's testimony it is strong circumstantial evidence of her presence there, but it isn't enough to make out a case against her at this stage of the game."

"Perhaps you're right," the sheriff admitted. "She's a smart woman, I'll say that for her; she may be on the point of collapse, as Doc Hale says, but she was able to think straight enough to suggest the main question we've got to find the answers to. She tried to explain one of them herself, do you remember?"

She said that she couldn't think of any reason why Latimer returned from the station last night except for something he might have forgotten, but you might put another construction on that. What if he'd never intended to go to the city at all? What if his going as far as the station was just a blind and he meant all the time to come sneaking back?"

"I've thought of that." Odell smiled. "The butler said he liked to drop in at the works when the people weren't expecting him, that he was that kind; and the man's tone suggested resentment against a spying propensity on the part of his master. That theory would account, too, for the fact that Latimer walked home instead of taking a conveyance. It's a good two miles, isn't it?"

"Maybe a little more," the sheriff replied reflectively. "He would hardly take the trouble in all that cold and with a bag, too, just to spy on the servants. It looks clear enough that he was watching Mrs. Latimer; and what would she be doing down in that lonely place by the pond at such an hour except to meet somebody—?"

"Steady, there!" Odell cautioned. "That's all right in theory, but we'll have to have proof, you know, and this house isn't the best place to talk things over. It would help if we could trace his movements from the time he got out of his car at the station last night.— But first we ought to telephone to her attorneys for her."

"Sure. Lefferts and Crewe, she said, didn't she?"

The sheriff motioned toward the telephone. "Go to it, Barry."

Odell shook his head.

"I'm not on this case, you know," he reminded the other. "I couldn't take even a minor hand in it officially; my place is on the metropolitan police bureau, and my sick-leave expires anyway in a week. I'm sorry, for it promises to be as nice a little problem as any I ever encountered in town and I'd like to see it through, but it isn't possible."

"Nonsense! That bullet hole you got through the shoulder when you caught Killer Jordan ain't half healed yet and you can get an extension of leave," the sheriff urged. "Of course I don't say we can't handle this by ourselves out here, but it looks now as if it were going to be some job, and I'd like you in on it."

"We have a week, anyway, and I'll stick around," Odell promised. "It's nearly eleven; hadn't we better hear what Henry Eaves has got to say for himself and then see what we can learn of Latimer's movements last night?"

The sheriff thumbed over the telephone book and called up the offices of Lefferts and Crewe in New York. Mr. Lefferts, he was told, was in court, but the junior member of the law firm, Foster Crewe, received the news of his client's death with the proper expressions of shocked concern and promised to come out on the noon train.

"Now let's go and find Henry." The sheriff locked the moleskin coat in a closet near one of the bookcases and pocketed the key together with the torn strip of

fur. "There's not much for a gardener to do around a place like this in winter time, but maybe he's a sort of handy man."

They passed out through the kitchen and rear porch and eventually discovered the object of their search emerging from the cowstable. He paused at sight of them and setting down the feed-pail which he was carrying stolidly awaited their approach.

"I didn't know Mr. Latimer kept any livestock, Henry," the sheriff observed.

"He was just starting, sir," the man replied respectfully. "We have three prize Jerseys, but two of them are dry now. Would you care to see them, sir?"

He turned and led the way into the clean, airy, steam-heated stable and pointed out the three cows in their stalls. Save for them and a huge dog chained to a staple and lying on a pile of straw in a corner the place was empty.

"Mr. Latimer was planning to breed and raise Jerseys, sir."

"Didn't he have a man to take care of them?" the sheriff demanded. "I thought you were a gardener."

"I am, but I understand all about cattle, too, and there isn't enough to do around the place for Mr. Latimer to have employed any more men. He meant to when the frost broke, of course."

The dog stirred, rattling his chain, and his great eyes fixed themselves questioningly on the newcomers.

"Is that the watchdog?" Odell asked suddenly. "Great Dane, isn't he?"

"Yes." Henry nodded. "He's kind of stodgy now;

had his first good meal in I don't know when. You can see how thin he is. Mr. Latimer kept him half starved on purpose so he'd be savage, but he wasn't cut out to be any watchdog; he's too friendly by nature."

As though conscious that he was the subject of conversation the dog raised his head, and his tail thumped the straw lazily.

The sheriff shot a meaning glance at his young friend and then asked:

"Do you turn him loose at night?"

"Yes. At least, those were Mr. Latimer's orders, but Mrs. Latimer didn't like it; it always made her nervous to think of him prowling about and maybe springing on somebody who was only taking a short cut across the property. He's never hurt anybody yet, but you can't tell what a dog will do if he's kept hungry enough."

"How long has Mr. Latimer had him?"

"Paladin? That's his name.—Mr. Latimer bought him for me to bring down here when he sent me on ahead of the rest of the staff." Henry paused. "I've been here since just after Thanksgiving and the family didn't move out until nearly Christmas."

"Thanksgiving!" the sheriff repeated. "I thought Mr. Latimer only bought the place from the Hopewells in December."

"I don't know anything about that, sir." Henry shrugged. "Maybe the sale wasn't recorded till then, but Mr. Latimer must have had possession, for he

took me only a few days before Thanksgiving and told me to get ready to come out here."

"How did Mr. Latimer come to engage you?" Odell interposed for the second time. "Through an agency?"

For an instant the man hesitated and then replied:

"No, sir. He knew of me from Mrs. Latimer. I used to work at her old home in Massachusetts and he—he sent for me."

"You worked on the Fairfield place, at Fairfield Harbor?" Odell demanded quickly. "How long?"

"For fifteen years, sir. I left about five years ago and married, but my wife died and I rented my farm. Mrs. Latimer heard I was looking for a place as head gardener again and she got Mr. Latimer to take me on."

The man spoke hurriedly now and his eyes wandered everywhere but to the face of his interrogator.

"Do the other servants know that you are an old employee of Mrs. Latimer?" Odell persisted.

"I don't know, sir." The man raised his eyes. "Maggie has been with Mrs. Latimer always, but as for the others, I never discussed it with them that I remember. Curry is the only one I talk with now and then, and I'm usually one to keep my business to myself."

Odell advanced a step or two and his voice was very grave.

"Was there any reason, Henry, why the others shouldn't have known?"

The man squared his bent shoulders in unconscious defiance of the other's imputation.

"Certainly not! What reason could there be? I never thought whether they knew or not, nor that it mattered. It's none of their business where I worked before and they're none of them my kind."

"Well, Henry" — Odell relinquished the topic — "what do you know of last night's affair? When was the last time you saw Mr. Latimer alive?"

"The last time I talked to him was yesterday morning before he went to town," the other replied hastily in evident relief. "He came out to give me some instructions about the cows. I saw him when he got out of the car at the door late yesterday afternoon on his return, but not to speak to him. That was the last time."

"You knew that he started for the station again later?"

"Yes. I was at dinner with Curry when he was sent for and told to have the car around at half past eight. When he'd gone I came out here to give Paladin a bit of meat I'd saved for him and then went to the garage and waited for Curry. We had a smoke together, and then I took him to look over some catalogues, and he slept over night in my room; the steam heat wasn't working right in the garage and it was too cold for him to stay there."

"Was Paladin loose last night?"

The man shook his head and a dull flush crept up beneath the tan on his weather-beaten countenance.

"No. He should have been, but I—I forgot. I was busy thinking of some new farm machinery. I'm sure neither Curry nor me saw anything amiss around the

place. Mr. Latimer must have changed his mind and come back very unexpectedly."

"Your duties take you all over the property, don't they?" The sheriff had wandered ostentatiously over to the dog and Odell continued his questioning.

"Yes, sir, but only to keep an eye on things occasionally. There's little to be done outdoors now."

"Have you noticed anyone hanging about in the last few days?"

"No." Henry hesitated again. "There's a gap in the hedge here and there that I meant to attend to when spring comes, and down across a corner of the south pasture there is a kind of path been worn by folks who live around and took a short cut through. The last owners didn't mind, I guess, but Mr. Latimer wanted it blocked up."

"Have you ever seen any of the neighbors use that short cut?" Odell asked.

"Oh, yes. I had no orders from Mr. Latimer to keep them out yet, and it's a long way round by the road in this snow and ice. That Dutchman, Vorn, who has a duck farm just back here, uses it mostly, but he don't go to the village very often. I've seen him perhaps four or five times all told since I came, but he's a dumb sort of fellow and hardly ever speaks."

The sheriff turned and laughed shortly as he approached them.

"I know Chris Vorn!" he exclaimed. "He's had a grouch against the world ever since his wife ran away and left him, and he isn't what you might call sociable. The small farmers that live back around here have used

that short cut since I can remember, and the Hopewells were always neighborly about it; they won't take kindly to having a city man move out here and block it up."

"Well"—Henry shrugged again and for an instant a grim suspicion of a smile hovered about his rugged lips—"maybe they can keep on using it now."

He turned to one of the stalls and began stroking the velvety nose of its bovine inmate as though the interview were over, and the sheriff drew Odell to the door.

"You'll hold yourself in readiness to appear at the inquest if you're called," he announced from the threshold.

"I'll be ready," Henry responded.

"Well, what do you think of that customer?" the sheriff asked as they made their way down the drive. "Funny thing he forgot to turn the dog loose last night of all times, wasn't it?"

"It may mean a lot, or nothing." Odell kicked at a lump of frozen snow in his path. "The most significant thing is that none of the other servants except Maggie seemed to know that he had been in Mrs. Latimer's employ years ago; certainly Bangs wasn't aware of it or he would have mentioned it. There must be some reason why it was kept from them."

He stopped abruptly as they turned into the high-road. Sam Jenks was fulfilling his appointed task valiantly and seemed thoroughly enjoying his new importance and authority. He had drawn his milk wagon straight across the road, effectually blocking

it, and was haranguing the indignant owners of several small cars which were dammed up against it. Save for a tenacious group huddled together the crowd had scattered before the still, penetrating cold that had seemed to increase when the wind of early morning subsided.

"Sheriff's orders!" Sam was announcing in a loud voice. "I'm here to see that nobody passes, and that's all there is to it! You can turn and go around by the other road if you're in a hurry, Asa; I guess you ain't been sent for yet up to the Latimers'!"

Asa Grinnell, the village undertaker, growled a surly response from the driver's seat of his small, somber-looking truck and was turning the wheel when the sheriff hailed him.

"Going back, Asa? Odell and I will ride down with you as far as Main Street. Sam, you can get along, too, now. There's nothing more for anyone to see up at the Latimer place and nobody'll be allowed in the house. Come on, Barry."

They squeezed themselves into the narrow seat beside the undertaker, and the latter remarked sourly:

"Got old man Moore to bury on the Valley Creek turnpike tomorrow and he ain't even laid out yet; I been too busy. I wasn't looking for the Latimer trade, anyhow; they'll likely get some big firm out from the city. Was he pretty well messed up?"

He spoke with professional interest, and as the sheriff replied to him Odell sat back and mentally reviewed the case as it had presented itself to his trained mind.

Latimer had not been liked by his employees and certainly he had not been loved by his wife to the extent of any uncontrollable display of grief at his tragic death. What rendezvous had he kept there by the frozen expanse of that lonely pond? Had he come as a principal or as eavesdropper, and whose hand had struck him down?

Did any of the servants know more than they had told? The chauffeur and gardener had mutually sustained alibis, the housemaid and cook had evidently been only too anxious to unburden themselves, and Bangs' testimony, although prompted by malice, appeared on the surface to be sincere as far as it went. The New England spinster, Maggie, with her shrewish tongue and obvious devotion to her mistress, would bear further examination, but Odell doubted if anything could be wrung from her by artifice or surprise which would be damaging now that she was on her guard.

It was Mrs. Latimer herself who presented the greatest problem. Frail, yet strong with a strength which she seemed to summon by sheer force of will, stunned and yet rallying instantly to the exigencies of the moment, shrinking and helpless, on the point of collapse, but composed enough to face the tragic problem squarely and try to reason it out, she was an anomaly which made him shake his head.

If her husband had ill-treated her, if those faint bruises upon her wrists had been made by his hands in one of those fits of rage to which most of the servants had borne testimony, it was not to be wondered

at that whatever love she might have had for him at the time of their marriage had died. But there was no indication that she had been directly concerned in his death and scarcely sufficient motive for a woman of delicate sensibilities to descend to murder even if she possessed the physical strength to have struck that blow. Only the butler's inability to obtain a response from her when he had knocked on the door the previous night, and that bit of fur clinging to the holly tree, could be construed as circumstantial evidence of her possible presence at the scene of the crime.

Odell mentally shook himself as they rattled past the clustering village dwellings and slued along the trolley tracks of Main Street. Why was he trying to find flaws in the suppositions which filled his thoughts even before they assumed the proportions of an actual theory? After six years' experience on the biggest criminal cases in the annals of the New York police department, was he becoming impressionable?

The investigation had scarcely begun and not a tithe of the necessary data was in his hands; need he remind himself like a tyro that he must preserve an open mind?

Before the door of the undertaker's establishment the sheriff and his friend alighted and made their way to the station. It was almost train time, but there were few travelers at that hour, and the ticket agent waxed loquacious when he recognized the official.

"Hear Mr. Latimer was found dead up by the pond on his place today!" he began in tones which pene-

trated to the farthest recesses of the waiting room. "Jim Snell got it from Sam Jenks when he came down for the constable. Is it true?"

The sheriff nodded.

"That's about the size of it. Were you here after eight o'clock last night?"

"No. Didn't come round after supper; my youngest kid's sick and the wife felt kind of nervous about her, so Hiram said he'd 'tend to the tickets and the telegraph as well as looking after the baggage. You know yourself that there's precious little doing around at night, especially in winter." His face reddened and he added avidly: "Why? Wasn't any foul play about Latimer's death, was there? Jim Snell said something about 'murder,' but I thought it was just his talk. I haven't heard tell of any strangers hanging around the station last night, if that's what you're getting at.—Here's Hiram now."

The lanky, sandy-haired baggage man had sauntered into view through the door of the ticket office which connected with the trunk room. He started when he saw the sheriff's head protruding through the aperture, and at the latter's imperative gesture he turned and went hurriedly out to the platform where Pettin-gill and Odell met him.

"Look here, Hiram," the sheriff began, "how long were you in charge here last night?"

"Till six this morning." Hiram's eyes bulged. "What's the matter? Thieves? There wasn't a soul around here after ten o'clock until the agent relieved me today. I been asleep in bed ever since and I ain't

heard any news. Everything looks all right in the baggage-room—!"

"There's been no robbery," the sheriff responded. "I just want to know who was around the station last night. What time did you take charge?"

"I was here at six, but the agent didn't go off till seven, and then he sent one of his little boys down to ask me if I'd look after things for him for the evenin'. Travel was light and I didn't mind. There were only two trains between seven and eight from the city, and most of the commuters had come out earlier. There were two the other way, too, but nobody got off."

"And after eight?"

Hiram removed his cap and scratched his head reflectively.

"Well, there was the eight-twenty from the city, but nobody came on that except Mr. Farwell and old Mr. Kingsley. Mr. Farwell nodded to me and hurried off, and I don't wonder, for it was almighty cold; but Mr. Kingsley stopped for a little talk like he always does whenever he gets back from the city." Hiram paused and frowned as though his mental processes required strenuous effort. "Let me see! That was all, until that new fellow out at the Hopewell place, Mr. Latimer, drove up in his little car."

"What time was this?"

"Along about twenty minutes to nine, I reckon, because I was just wheeling out Mis' Price's sister's trunk, that was going to Brooklyn on the eight-fifty.

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The car went kiting away and left Mr. Latimer on the platform."

"Did he say anything to you? How did he seem?" the sheriff asked impatiently.

"Why? What's he been doing?" Hiram demanded in his turn. "I never did like him since he first come, ordering folks around as if they was dirt. That may go in the city, but out here a man's as good as the next one! I didn't pay any 'tention to him till he came up and asked me if the train was on time; I told him it wasn't no limited, and they didn't usually wire on ahead unless there'd been a washout!"

He guffawed at his own witticism, but the sheriff broke in sharply:

"Why didn't he take the train?"

"Didn't he?" Hiram stared. "I was busy loading on that trunk so I didn't notice. He wasn't here after the train left, I know. Maybe he went off with the other fellow."

"What other fellow?" The sheriff almost bellowed the question, and Hiram's jaw dropped for a minute. Then he replied:

"I don't know who it was; didn't notice him in particular. It was after Mr. Latimer had spoke to me and I'd walked away from him that I saw a fellow come out from behind the baggage truck where he must have been loafing and go up to him. The last I saw of either of them they were talking together."

"What did the man look like? It's a pity you couldn't have kept your eyes open!" the sheriff fumed.

"Don't you remember anything about him at all?"

The baggage man spat contemplatively.

"There wasn't nothing about him to remember!" he said defensively. "He was dressed up in city clothes—dark overcoat and derby hat—and he seemed to be just middling height; I didn't see his face, but he seemed to know Mr. Latimer all right. He called him by name.—Seems to me there was one thing I sort of recollect, though; he had a nasty kind of cough!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE VOICE FROM THE DOORWAY

UNABLE to elicit any further information from the wondering baggage-man, the sheriff and Odell left him to be enlightened by the ticket agent as to the cause of their interrogation, and passing between the gaping groups in the waiting-room of the station started up the street in the direction of the county jail.

"I'll send a deputy up to the Latimer place now for the bag we left under the couch and that fur coat," the sheriff announced. "He can jam the coat in the bag, I guess, and get it out of the house without the butler or anyone seeing him. We'll go back there later, Barry, after the lawyer comes. I want to get a line on Latimer from him, but in the meantime I've got to see the district attorney."

"In that case—" Odell stopped. "Suppose I look around a bit myself for a time? It may be that I can pick up the trail from the station last night. We haven't got much to go on; a man of average height, in average clothes, with a cough!"

"He was a stranger, though," the sheriff remarked. "There aren't many around here in winter time. Somebody else must have seen him if he hung around."

"It doesn't necessarily follow that he was a stranger because that Hiram can't identify him." Odell shook

his head. "He merely said that he didn't notice him particularly. The fact that the man was a stranger might have penetrated even his dull consciousness and aroused his curiosity, but if there had been something vaguely familiar about him his presence would have been less likely to impress the baggage-man."

"That's too deep for me!" The sheriff laughed. "Go at it your own way, though, Barry; I'm mighty glad of your help. I'll meet you at the house for dinner and we'll go up to the Latimer place again together."

Odell retraced his steps to the station and from there started back up Main Street in the direction which Latimer must have taken on the previous night, studying the solid phalanx of shop-fronts on either side and mentally orienting himself. During the fortnight of sick-leave in which he had been the guest of his old friend Sheriff Pettingill, he had come to know this curious little village from the standpoint of a mere sojourner; but now he regarded it with professional interest.

Originally a settlement which dated back to Colonial days, it had become the local trade center and county seat, and in later years the bucolic charm of the surrounding hills had been discovered by an opulent class of former city dwellers. Large and more or less pretentious estates had swallowed up many of the smaller farms, and a smart country club set had sprung up mushroom-like among the staid older inhabitants.

The village of Sunnymead itself, however, had evidently changed very little. A garage or two, an ornate link of the chain of suburban drugstores, a motion picture theater and an Italian importer of fruits

and condiments marked the only spots of invasion; and the rest of Main Street valiantly maintained its array of modest, mildly progressive shops, and ton-sorial and billiard parlors.

Only the latter would have been open in the evenings during that season of the year, Odell decided, and he paused before the first one from the station. The proprietor, a fat, jolly-looking individual, was sweeping off the steps and looked up with a friendly nod.

"Right cold, ain't it?" he observed. "Fellow come in here awhile ago and said Latimer had been killed and you was up there with the constable. I only knew him by sight, but it was sure a sudden taking off. How'd it happen?"

"We don't know yet," Odell replied frankly. "He went down to the station last night for the eight-fifty train, but never took it. I don't suppose you saw him pass by on his way home?"

The fat man nodded again in naive triumph.

"That's just what I did do!" he exclaimed. "A crowd of the fellows had been in here playing, and between their smoking and the stovepipe not working right you couldn't draw a breath! I opened the door to let in a little fresh air, and it come to me that the eight-fifty was almost due, and I stood there waiting for it to come in. Mr. Latimer passed, walking real quick and slapping his feet down on the sidewalk like he was mad or excited about something, and he never looked up. I remember thinking that he must have just got in from the city because he was carrying a bag, but there hadn't been no train since

the eight-twenty, and I wondered what he'd been hanging around the station in the cold for all that time. Then one of the fellows hollered about the draught and I shut the door, just as the eight-fifty pulled up at the station."

"Was Mr. Latimer alone?"

"Sure he was. The whole street was deserted as far as I could see; it was too cold for folks to be out unless they had to. Who do you s'pose killed him? We ain't had any excitement like that around here since the post office was broke into!"

Odell disclaimed any prescience as to how the mystery would turn out, and continued on up the street. What had become of the other man with whom Latimer had talked at the station? Had he taken the eight-fifty back to town, or skulked behind the other those two bleak miles to Willow Brook and done him to death there by the pond?

The detective stopped here and there and chatted with the drugstore clerk, a garage man, and bluff, hearty William McMahan, who ran the hotel; but nowhere did he glean any further information. Since he passed the billiard parlor Latimer had been seen by no one whom Odell could discover, and his erstwhile companion at the station had apparently vanished into thin air.

As he left the hotel he heard the whistle of the noon train from the city, and a few minutes later a jitney-bus passed him in reckless haste and rattled out along the road which led in the direction of Willow Brook, which the natives still spoke of as "the Hopewell place." Odell caught a glimpse in its swaying interior of a

sleek but troubled white face with huge tortoise-rimmed glasses above the upturned fur collar of an overcoat, and concluded that Mrs. Latimer's legal adviser had arrived upon the scene.

He found the sheriff awaiting him in his pleasant white house set back in a grove of gaunt maples, and the steaming mid-day dinner was already on the table. Mrs. Pettingill was a plump, smiling little woman with sufficient tact to minister to their appetites before she gave voice to her curiosity; and Odell detailed for her edification such facts in the case as were already common talk in the village.

"I suppose it's no use to ask you if you've found out anything!" she remarked when he had finished. "John is always as close-mouthed as a clam when anything's been happening around here, but we don't often have murders, thank goodness! It don't seem right for that poor woman to be up there all alone with just the hired help at a time like this, but I'd be the last person she'd let be neighborly, on account of John; she'd think I was there to spy on all of them."

Odell remembered a chance bit of gossip he had heard earlier and remarked:

"I understand that some of the families about have called on Mrs. Latimer, and perhaps they'll go to her now, but I don't believe she wants to see anyone. Who were they, do you know, Mrs. Pettingill?"

"The Presbyterian minister was one; she went to church there once or twice when she first came, but she hasn't been since he called. Then there were the Wagners, that keep that department store in Brooklyn and have been trying so hard to get in with the hunt-

ing and country club people, and Mrs. Weed, who always calls on new folks when they move out here." Mrs. Pettingill cut a generous second helping of pie and passed it to their guest. "That's all I've heard about. The town people think the Latimers are a little too rich and fashionable to travel with them, I guess, and the country club set were kind of holding off."

"Why?" asked Odell. "I understand that Latimer was a wealthy manufacturer—"

"Oh, well, it isn't only the money," she commented shrewdly. "I guess they were waiting to see what sort of folks they entertained. It did look sort of funny, their not having a big house-party down over Christmas like most of the others did, but I s'pose they weren't settled yet."

"Do any of them—the country club people—live near the Latimers?"

"Only Montgomery Robbins, the broker. There's just him and his wife, and they have that great big place this side of Mrs. Vail's cottage. The Prestons is on the other side, but it is closed for the winter; they're the only estates owned by society people between the village and the Latimers'. Some commuters who don't go in for the country club sports have built nice all-year bungalows, though. Mr. Farwell's is just across the road from Mrs. Vail's, and the Ruyterdahl's beyond."

"What is opposite the Latimer place?" Odell made a tentative move to rise as the sheriff glanced meaningfully at the clock. "I didn't notice particularly, but I don't think I saw any house near."

"You didn't." Mrs. Pettingill pushed back her chair. "That land is all part of the old Beauregard farm and extends for two miles or more beyond, before you come to the remains of the house; it was destroyed by fire years ago. — Mind you boys aren't late for supper!"

In the sheriff's own little car the two returned to the Latimer place, and on the way Odell mentally located each home of which Mrs. Pettingill had told him. The Montgomery Robbins residence was a pretentious affair set on a rise of ground in a stiff, formal garden; Mrs. Vail's humble cottage snuggled almost apologetically between its tall, ornate iron palings and the squat, substantial stone fence of the Prestons' more conservative estate on the other side. Across the way a small, wide-verandaed concrete bungalow stood behind a trim hedge of box, and Odell recalled that it belonged to one of those whom Mrs. Pettingill designated as "commuters."

The baggage-man had spoken of a Mr. Farwell as being one of the two men who came out on the eight-twenty train from the city on the previous night, but he had hurried home. It had been the other, Kingsley, who stopped for a few words of greeting. Odell determined, if other clues failed, to interview both these gentlemen.

Bangs admitted them in answer to their ring and there was an air of such conscious mystery in his manner that the sheriff halted him on the way to announce their arrival.

"What's up now?" he demanded "Has anything new developed since we were here this morning?"

"I'm sure it's not for me to say, sir." The butler pursed his lips smugly. "It was you brought in Mr. Latimer's bag, and your man that called later must have taken it away with him, for it's not to be found. Mr. Crewe says that some papers are missing that he knows to have been in Mr. Latimer's possession yesterday; at least, that's what I gathered, sir. I'll tell Mr. Crewe you are here."

He ushered them into a dim, widely spaced drawing-room in which solid but delicately lined pieces of old mahogany were grouped, and on the hearth at the farther end of which a bed of red coals glowed in the grate.

"Did you examine the bag again when your man brought it down to your office?" Odell asked when he and the sheriff were alone.

The other nodded.

"There wasn't a bit of paper in it; nothing but toilet articles and a change of linen," he replied. "I looked carefully over the handful of papers we took from his pocket, and I have them here with me if the lawyer wants to examine them. I couldn't see that they could have had any bearing on the murder."

The door opened again and Mr. Crewe entered. Odell's surmise of the morning was correct, and he recognized at a glance the man he had seen in the jitney driving at such a furious rate from the station.

"Gentlemen, this is a horrible affair!" The newcomer advanced, nervously fingering the broad, black ribbon from which his tortoise-rimmed glasses were suspended, and his near-sighted brown eyes turned questioningly from one to the other of them. He was

a well groomed, rather pedantic-appearing individual of approximately forty, and his countenance still bore traces of shock. "May I ask which one of you is the sheriff?"

"I am, Mr. Crewe." Pettingill stepped forward and the other bowed. "This is Sergeant Odell, of the homicide bureau of New York. He is not officially connected with this investigation, of course, but he happens to be visiting me and has naturally taken an interest in the case."

"I am glad to know you," Mr. Crewe said gravely. "My partner and I have been Mr. Latimer's legal advisers for some years, and we are now Mrs. Latimer's. We shall be glad to cooperate with you in every possible way. You will understand what an inexpressible shock the news of this affair has been to us both. Have you—have you made any definite progress?"

"We have had little to go upon." The sheriff spoke evasively. "I have called now to learn what details you can give me of Mr. Latimer's personal affairs. Practically nothing is known of him out here except that he is reputed to have been a wealthy manufacturer."

"Wealthy?" The attorney raised his eyebrows. "That is a term which is subject to qualification in these days of colossal fortunes, Sheriff. Mr. Latimer made tremendous financial strides during the late war, of course, but since then there has been a natural reaction, and I should not say that his factories had been running more than half their capacity. This spring, however, he had planned to put out on the market a new and practical commercial plane of which I be-

lieve Mrs. Latimer has told you, and he had put most of his available capital into the venture, at the same time shutting down upon his output of other models; so that his income has been nil for the past few months."

"What, in round figures, would you say is the value of the estate, Mr. Crewe?" the sheriff asked.

"That is a difficult question to answer." The attorney motioned to two chairs and dropping into a third crossed one immaculately creased trouser leg over the other. "The controlling stock of which Mr. Latimer stood possessed in his corporation at the moment of his death is worth approximately half a million dollars. If this new project proves successful, it will advance, of course, and if unsuccessful, proportionately decrease. He had drawing accounts in several banks, and until they are balanced no estimate can be made."

"He had no other holdings?"

"None of which we are aware except this estate," the attorney responded cautiously.

"To your knowledge, did Mr. Latimer leave a will?"

"Mr. Lefferts, my senior, executed one for him at the time of his marriage, but you will comprehend that I could not divulge its contents, if I were cognizant of them, until the proper time." Mr. Crewe drew himself up slightly.

"Naturally!" Odell interposed, with his boyishly genial smile. "I hope, sir, that you won't mind my asking a question or two with the sheriff's authority?"

Mr. Crewe bowed again.

"Of course the court records of the states of New

Jersey and Connecticut as well as those of New York will furnish us with data on any possible law in which Mr. Latimer may have been involved of late, but you will be breaking no professional confidences and saving us much valuable time by telling us if there were any such cases." Odell paused, but as the other did not speak he went on: "We know that there were strikes and other troubles at both Mr. Latimer's plants, and we have also learned that he was a man of a decidedly belligerent temperament."

The attorney started inadvertently.

"I would scarcely subscribe to that," he disclaimed. "He was a very dominant character and stood upon his rights, as he had every reason to do. Since the day of its incorporation the Latimer Airplane Company has been involved in no legal controversy; I can assure you of that."

"And Mr. Latimer personally?" Odell persisted.

There was a pause, and then Mr. Crewe replied firmly:

"No legal proceedings of any nature have been taken against him."

Odell smiled to himself. That pause had been too suggestive to be overlooked.

"Mr. Crewe, you said that you would be glad to cooperate with us in this investigation in any possible way. I am sure the sheriff appreciates the delicacy of your position under the circumstances, but you will readily grasp the fact that a too conservative attitude on your part will lead us to infer that there is something to conceal which, although you may be convinced that it has no bearing on the murder, may

prove to be an important factor in the case. Suppose I put the question in another way. Has Mr. Latimer brought suit against anyone for any cause whatsoever? Has he called upon the law to protect him in any way?"

Mr. Crewe's face reddened with offended dignity.

"He has not, sir!"

"We know that he had made enemies; Mrs. Latimer has told us that he has been threatened more than once." Odell spoke still quietly but with a note of determination. "Has he spoken of bringing suit, or having anyone placed under bonds to keep the peace?"

"Mr. Latimer has—er—anathematized the disturbing element in his factories, and mentioned cranks and deluded would-be inventors from time to time." Mr. Crewe had regained his surface urbanity of manner, and he replied with a simulation of candor. "His industry was of a nature to bring him into contact with such individuals, and in moments of exasperation he may have uttered assertions which he had really no intention of carrying out in fact. I cannot recall the name of any particular person between whom and himself there existed such a degree of mutual enmity as would have reached the pitch of assault with intent to kill."

"I can, Crewe!" A new voice, strong and virile, rang out from the doorway. "I'm not accusing anybody—the man may have been a thousand miles away—but how about Sun Hsu?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE THREAT OF SUN HSU

WITH a common impulse they turned to discover a fourth man standing on the threshold. He was in the early thirties, long and lean and lithe, and he bore himself with the well poised erectness of military training, unmistakable even in mufti. His face was thin and tanned, with a hint of sensitiveness in the finely chiseled nostrils and mobile but firmly held lips; and his gray eyes studied them with a steady, unwinking gaze.

"Mr. Agnew!" The attorney rose precipitately. "I did not know that you were—that you had been—!"

"I brought my sister out," the other explained. "She insisted on coming as soon as she learned of Mr. Latimer's death, and I wished to offer my services. I must apologize for my intrusion, and withdraw."

"Just a moment!" The sheriff halted him. "Your name is Agnew?"

The newcomer bowed.

"Starr Agnew."

"I'm the sheriff of this county," Pettingill announced. "This is an associate of mine—Mr. Odell. I take it you're a friend of the family; any objections to answering a few questions?"

Mr. Agnew advanced with a slight smile.

"And I take it that it wouldn't do me much good if I had, Sheriff! As a matter of fact, I'll be glad to tell you anything I can."

"Now you're talking!" the sheriff exclaimed approvingly with a side-glance at the perturbed attorney. "Naturally we're starting blind in an investigation of this kind, and we've just been trying to see if the late Mr. Latimer's lawyer, here, couldn't suggest any lead. You spoke of Mr. Latimer's death; did you learn that he had been murdered?"

"Not positively. I heard that he had been found dead out in the grounds here somewhere, with a wound in his forehead." Agnew turned to the attorney. "I say, Crewe, I'm sorry if I've interrupted a conference. If you and the sheriff agree I'll wait in the library until you've finished—"

"I have nothing of a private nature to discuss with the authorities relative to Mr. Latimer's affairs at this time," Crewe responded coldly. "The situation is in the hands of the sheriff."

"Exactly," the latter individual interposed dryly. "Mr. Agnew, you said you arrived with your sister. May I ask if she is Miss Doris Agnew?"

"Yes!" There was surprise and a shade of reserve in the younger man's tones. "She is with Mrs. Latimer now, I think. Why do you ask?"

"Because a Miss Doris Agnew has been mentioned to us as one of Mrs. Latimer's closest friends, and as having telephoned out here to her at about nine o'clock last evening."

"She did." Mr. Agnew nodded. "I understand that the butler said Mrs. Latimer was not at home—"

"She had retired!" the attorney interrupted hurriedly. "It was a mistake on the butler's part, but a trivial one."

The sheriff exchanged glances with Odell and the latter bent forward in the chair which he had resumed.

"Mr. Agnew, will you tell us, please, who the person is to whom you referred just now on entering? The name sounded Chinese."

"It is. Perhaps it was indiscreet of me to mention it since Mr. Crewe had not seen fit to do so—"

"I did not think it of sufficient importance," the attorney interrupted once more, biting his lips. "Sun Hsu was one of the cranks who has annoyed Mr. Latimer with impractical inventions, Sheriff. He is a young Chinaman who was educated in this country, a university graduate, I believe. He had worked out some sort of theory in regard to airplanes—I know nothing of such matters myself—and besieged Mr. Latimer for months with plans and specifications. Hundreds of such crack-brained ideas were constantly being foisted on Mr. Latimer, and he saw that this was as impossible as the rest. Later this Sun Hsu became obsessed with the notion that Mr. Latimer had—er—appropriated his device, or whatever it was, and made a nuisance of himself, but for some months now he has dropped from sight. Personally, I think he was slightly deranged. That is really all there was to the matter; he was merely one of many such

eccentric characters with whom a manufacturer of any mechanical object is bound to come in contact."

The sheriff had listened carefully, but Odell had been watching the face of the latest arrival and noted the doubtful expression which had deepened upon it, and now he turned once more to the attorney.

"You speak of this Sun Hsu as having 'made a nuisance of himself,' Mr. Crewe. You must realize how important it is for the authorities to trace every possible potential enemy of Mr. Latimer. In what way was the Chinaman a nuisance? Did he make threats?"

"Yes, of a vague, rambling sort."

"Did he ever attempt violence?"

"Not that I am aware of." Mr. Crewe stirred impatiently in his chair. "He hung about the factories and the New York offices of the corporation and wrote letters—the usual sort of thing."

"Were any of those letters preserved among Mr. Latimer's effects, to your knowledge?"

Mr. Crewe smiled.

"I do not imagine that Mr. Latimer considered them of sufficient interest or importance. Certainly I know of none so retained," he replied. Then his manner underwent an abrupt change. "I understand that you have in your possession the bag which Mr. Latimer took to the station with him last night, and I presume that you have also assumed custody of whatever valuables and papers were found on his person when the body was discovered. We shall of course look after the widow's interests in the matter of the estate, and

I am anxious to know just what documents relative to Mr. Latimer's business affairs were in his immediate possession at the hour of his death. Will you permit me to go over them, or will it be necessary for me to obtain an order to do so?"

"You have access to them after the inquest, Mr. Crewe," the sheriff responded.

"But, my dear sir, it is imperative that I have an immediate opportunity to examine them!" Mr. Crewe flushed. "I am willing, of course, to do so in your presence and that of any other official, and they shall be left in your custody if you can show any valid claim to their retention as evidence. I merely wish to assure myself that a certain document has not been lost."

"Or stolen?" Odell interposed quietly. "As one of the attorneys for the estate, Mr. Crewe, you may as well know in advance a certain matter which will be brought out at the inquest. Mr. Latimer's bag had been ransacked and thrown into the brook."

Starr Agnew uttered a low, surprised exclamation, and the lawyer gripped the arms of the chair.

"You are certain of this?" the latter gasped.

"Yes. A hole had been chopped in the frozen surface of the brook and this led to the discovery of the bag. Its contents showed plainly that it had been subjected to a hasty search. What leads you to the conclusion that the document you mention must have been either in the bag or upon the body?"

"The process of elimination—but I do not say that Mr. Latimer 'must' have had it with him. I con-

sider it possible, since I have been unable to discover it among the papers in his desk or safe here, and I was under the impression that he brought it out with him from town yesterday." There was a dry note of renewed caution in Mr. Crewe's tones. "Were there any documents in the bag when it was found?"

He addressed the sheriff, and the latter shook his head.

"No. Only clothing and toilet articles. However, I have here with me the letters and memoranda which I removed from the body, together with a list of the other belongings which are in the coroner's charge. I brought the papers in order to ask Mrs. Latimer a few questions concerning them, providing she were able to be interviewed."

From one of his own capacious pockets he produced a large manila envelope from which he took several smaller ones and a note-book and check-book. The envelopes had all evidently been sent through the mail and their tops slit, while upon the backs of one or two, figures and other memoranda had been scrawled in bold, black characters.

He handed them without comment to the attorney, while Starr Agnew started forward in his chair with a swift, involuntary movement and then settled back again.

Mr. Crewe glanced hastily through them and handed them back impatiently.

"The document is not here! You are certain these are all that you found?"

"Quite." Sheriff Pettingill drew from another

pocket a typewritten list and read conscientiously: "Pearl and platinum stick-pin, platinum watch with gold fob, gold key-ring, wallet containing one hundred and thirty dollars, platinum and gold cigar case and match box, and three dollars and sixty cents in silver.' —You'll notice among those envelopes Mr. Latimer's commutation ticket, and there is also upon one of his fingers a gold ring which we were unable to remove, but the coroner will do so. It is pretty conclusive from this that robbery wasn't the motive for the crime; that is, any ordinary robbery. What was that document you are so anxious about, Mr. Crewe?"

The attorney hesitated, and it seemed that he avoided the gaze of Mr. Agnew as well as that of the sheriff and Odell.

"It was quite large," he said at length, slowly and very deliberately. "Several typed sheets bound in a light blue cover and folded across once, as I remember. It would scarcely have fitted into that envelope in which you enclosed all the others, Sheriff, and Mr. Latimer would have been unlikely to carry it in one of his pockets; that was why I thought it might have been in his bag. You are sure that the lining is not loose?"

Sheriff Pettingill ignored the question.

"Look here, Mr. Crewe!" he said sternly. "I didn't ask you what that paper looked like; I asked you what it was!"

"I should be very glad to tell you, Sheriff, if I knew myself!" The attorney shrugged, but he sat well back in his chair as though all at once he found the re-

flected glow from the coals upon the hearth to be disconcerting. "I have described it to you as well and as fully as I am able."

The sheriff stared at him.

"If you don't know the nature of it why are you so anxious to find out whether it has disappeared or not?" he demanded.

"Because Mr. Latimer called at our offices yesterday afternoon, and he had that document, with others, in his brief case. I caught a glimpse of it when he opened the case to remove a contract which he wished to leave with us, and he mentioned its importance in a general way without disclosing its nature." Mr. Crewe paused and then added:

"When he left he said that he was going immediately to his train, and as it was after four o'clock then I suppose that he did so if he reached here at half past five. I really know nothing more about it."

"What did he say about that document?" The sheriff brought his clenched hand down upon the arm of his chair, and at the sound of the impact Mr. Crewe straightened and setting his glasses firmly upon his aquiline nose stared haughtily at the bucolic official.

"Really, I do not remember," he replied with deliberate intent. "I gathered merely that it had some connection with work then in progress in his factories; I cannot recall his exact words as my attention was fixed upon the contract."

The sheriff opened his lips for a heated rejoinder, but Odell quickly forestalled him.

"No doubt it is in the house somewhere; you can

scarcely have had time for an exhaustive search," he said smoothly. "To return to the affair of Sun Hsu—can you tell us when he first approached Mr. Latimer with his invention?"

"I cannot, sir!" the attorney retorted. "I heard nothing of the matter until Mr. Latimer complained that the fellow was annoying him."

"When did you first hear of this annoyance?"

"About March of last year, when Mr. and Mrs. Latimer returned from their honeymoon, I think. I cannot be more definite because, as I have said, cranks were continually subjecting Mr. Latimer to petty persecution of one sort or another." Mr. Crewe spoke with cold distaste and boredom. "He spoke of the fellow from time to time thereafter in terms of—er—irritation until some time during the late summer. I do not know when the man ceased to annoy Mr. Latimer; I simply do not recall hearing his name mentioned since that period."

The sheriff would have spoken again but Odell darted a warning glance at him and rose.

"Very well, Mr. Crewe. We will not detain you any longer. It is unnecessary, of course, to remind you that under the circumstances nothing—no papers or documents of any character—may be removed from the premises except by special permission from the local authorities. Does anyone beside yourself know the combination of Mr. Latimer's safe here?"

"I really couldn't say." Mr. Crewe had also risen and now he moved toward the door. "Mr. Latimer

gave it to both my partner and myself in the event of an emergency."

"'An emergency?'" Odell's repetition of the last two words with an interrogatory inflection halted the attorney on the threshold.

"If he were unavoidably detained on one of his business trips and some document were needed before his return," the other explained. "Mrs. Latimer was unacquainted with the details of his manufacturing interests and would therefore not have known what was required.—I shall remain here until time for the six o'clock train back to town, and if I can be of any further service to you I trust that you will let me know."

He bowed and turning crossed the hall to the library and closed the door after him with a subdued but emphatic thud.

"Pompous ass!" muttered Mr. Agnew; then, addressing the sheriff, he asked in a scarcely louder tone: "How is Mrs. Latimer? I haven't dared inquire about her yet. Gad, it must have been a terrific shock to her!"

"She was bearing it quite calmly when I interviewed her this morning, an hour or two after the discovery of the body," the sheriff responded. "How did you and your sister learn of the murder, Mr. Agnew? There could scarcely have been time for the news to have appeared in the city papers."

"It reached us by underground channels, I might say." Agnew's lips curved for an instant in a half smile. "The butler here, Bangs, is interested in my sister's maid, and he could not resist telephoning to

her. Of course she told my sister at once, and Doris summoned me from my office and insisted that I bring her out immediately; Mrs. Latimer is one of her closest friends, and she could not leave her alone in her trouble."

"You have known Mrs. Latimer for several years, have you not?" Odell asked. "Her maid tells us that your family had a country place near her home in Massachusetts."

"Yes." Agnew's reply was brief, but he eyed his questioner candidly. "We have known Mrs. Latimer for—let me see—for seven years."

"And Mr. Latimer?"

"Oh, I met him in England in 'sixteen. He was negotiating to sell battle-planes to the British government, and I was in training with the R. F. C. I couldn't wait for us to get started over here."

"You're an aviator, then?" Odell felt a sudden quickening of interest.

"Instructor." The other shrugged. "I was a bit old for the game, you know; twenty-seven then.—But you want to know about Latimer. I thought him a capital fellow, and when I met him in New York we renewed our acquaintanceship and I brought him 'round to the house."

"It was at your home that he met Miss Fairfield?"

"Yes.—Shocking thing, that he should have been killed like this! I suppose it's no good asking if you've any idea who did it?"

"Tell us what you know of this Sun Hsu," Odell countered, with one of his swift smiles.

"Nothing very much. I was waiting outside in the hall there for Bangs to return and tell me if there were anything I could do for Mrs. Latimer when I heard Crewe say he couldn't recall the name of anyone who hated Latimer enough to kill him. I suddenly remembered about that crazy young Chinese inventor, and butted in. It was unpardonable, of course, but I was so interested it took me off my feet."

"How did you hear about him first?"

"From Latimer himself. That must have been about a year and a half ago. I can't go into the details of his scheme now, but if it had been practicable it would have revolutionized flying then—made it as common as taxi-ing! It would have enabled a plane to rise straight up like a rocket and make a landing on any spot of its size, without a foot to spare. He had Latimer going for awhile, too, but after a time he must have dropped it,—Latimer, I mean,—for I didn't hear anything more about it until Sun Hsu began to threaten him, and claimed that he had stolen the invention. Sheer rot, of course; but he seemed more in earnest and consequently more dangerous than the average crank, and you never can tell about our cousins from the Far East. You can educate them in Occidental ways all you please, but in moments of real stress they'll revert to the days and customs of their ancestors, and then it is as well to look out."

"Did you ever see Sun Hsu?" Odell inquired.

"Once last spring when he was trying to gain admittance to Latimer's office. He's not a bad looking chap, rather taller than the average Chinese. If it weren't

for that upward quirk of his eyes at the corners he might pass for a sallow European; spoke with not a trace of an accent, I remember." Agnew paused. "Latimer had told me about the fellow hounding him, and I warned him to be careful, but he only laughed at me. I went West last summer, and when I returned I asked Latimer about Sun Hsu one day, and he said he heard the chap had gone back to China.—I don't know why I should have thought of him just now except that hearing the way Latimer had died recalled one of his picturesque threats to my mind."

"What was it?" Odell asked quickly.

"Oh, just nonsense, of course." Agnew looked somewhat uncomfortable. "It was a poetic little intimation that he would pierce the walls of the brain which had stolen his invention, that the Sun-God might pluck it forth and return it to his own keeping."

Odell and the sheriff gazed at each other and before them both arose the picture of the morning, when Gilbert Latimer lay with crushed forehead pillowed against the reddened snow.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RED MITTEN

A KNOCK at the door heralded the appearance of Bangs, with the announcement that Miss Agnew would like to speak to her brother; and when that young man had taken his departure from the room the sheriff observed reflectively:

"I don't know about that, Barry, though it did give me a turn for a minute! If it was one laundryman banged another one over the head with a flat-iron, I could get it, but not any of this Sun-God stuff. What do you think?"

"That our friend Crewe knows very well what that document is that is missing, but for some reason he won't admit it; and that although Agnew may be shocked, he isn't any more deeply grieved over his supposed friend's death than anyone else we have encountered so far," Odell replied. "It's a puzzle, all right, John, and nobody seems anxious to help us solve it. If Miss Agnew remains here with Mrs. Latimer we shall have an opportunity to interview her later, and I doubt if her testimony will give us any data of value, anyway. The man at the station who talked to Latimer last night is our one best bet if we can unearth him, but I'd like to go over the ground of the murder again while it is still light."

"Go on, then," the sheriff acquiesced good-naturedly. "I'm going to pump Bangs some more; I may get some inside information as to what took Mrs. Latimer down to that pond last night."

"If that suggestion is made at all, mind you let it come from him and not from you, or you'll give the show away!" Odell laughed. "I won't be more than an hour."

He slipped into his overcoat and let himself out the front door, going down the driveway to a point opposite the grove of willows and then cutting across to the pond. It lay like a shimmering sheet of glass beneath the lengthening rays of the afternoon sun, and the wind, which had risen once more, rustled the brittle twigs of the undergrowth and set little clouds of powdered frost eddying about his feet.

Silent and drear, wrapped in its wintry mantle, the scene was one which might well have been deserted by man for countless days; and no hint remained of the tragedy which the morning had disclosed save that spattering of sinister stains near the bank.

Odell went carefully over every foot of the frozen ground from the gap in the hedge to the clump of holly trees and back; but except where here and there a hummock had been kicked aside by one of the group which had surrounded the body in the morning, no traces were discernible. For some minutes he bent over the bow of the rowboat on the thwart of which the anchor had rested. Its outline was plain where it had lain embedded in the frost of the protracted

cold spell, and all at once Odell stooped and looked closer.

Surely there was the mark of some sharp but lighter instrument that had been used to pry the anchor loose! He wondered at the time of its discovery that the anchor had not been frozen solidly to the thwart, but could have been so readily snatched up to do its murderous work. If it had been necessary to pry it loose as these marks indicated, his own private surmise, which the dried blood upon its fluke in no way militated against, might prove to be the correct solution of one puzzling detail, after all.

But what instrument could have been so used? It could not have had a sharp blade like a knife, for it had been necessary to crush and scrape away the frozen snow in order to insert it beneath the anchor, as the result showed. It had been heavy enough for that, evidently, but not sufficiently so to break that jagged hole in the ice of the brook through which the bag had been dropped.

Leaving the weather-worn hulk of the craft, Odell made his way once more to the holly clump and through it to the shore of the brook. In which of three directions had the steps of the person who afterward submerged the bag turned—to that gap in the hedge which led to the high road, to the house itself, or back farther into the Willow Brook estate, possibly toward the garage or other outbuildings?

There was no sign to guide him, and the fine powder of dried particles of frost which had swirled and drifted down from the thorny, low-hung branches of

the trees would have obliterated any trace of a footprint; yet Odell turned and wandered idly in the third direction that had not heretofore been considered. Beyond the hollies the ground rose in an undulating hill around the base of which the brook wound on its way to the pond. Odell followed its bank until it narrowed to a mere trickle whose tinkling could be heard beneath the thinning veil of ice, and finally vanished in an impenetrable thicket of bushes.

His eyes swept the white, low-lying hills and fields broken only by the lines of hedge-rows, and he discovered that he had come out far behind the stables and farm buildings of the estate with nothing before him but a faint smudge of smoke arising from a distant clump of trees which denoted the presence of the nearest neighbor to the south.

The clear, frosty air brought to him a new sound besides the crunching of the hard snow beneath his solitary feet. It was the faint quacking as of multitudinous ducks and it came apparently from the spot where the smoke arose from a chimney. His interview of the morning with Henry Eaves, the gardener, returned to Odell's thoughts, and he realized that that must be the dwelling of Chris Vorn, the morose duck farmer who occasionally used the short cut through the Willow Brook property.

No sign of a path was visible, but to the left a field stretched away larger than the others surrounding it. Could that be the south pasture of which Henry Eaves had spoken? There was a narrow, ragged gap in the hedge which bordered it, and Odell pushed his

way through, noting as he did so that the twigs were bare of frost rime.

On the farther side a slight but unmistakable depression appeared leveled out between the higher ridges of snow and winding away across a corner of the field toward the distant group of trees. Odell followed it until he came to the bordering hedge once more. It was comparatively unkempt and straggling, as though little effort had been made by the late owners to cultivate it as trimly as the others nearer the main part of the estate. The subdued quacking of the ducks had become louder, and through the trees ahead Odell saw a road that was little more than a cart-track and the rear of a weatherbeaten, unpainted dwelling, with dilapidated outhouses clustered close.

Runways formed of sagging, rusted wire fencing led down to a small, ice-coated pond which was evidently a mere hollow of inundated marshland, for tufts of brown grasses stuck up stiffly through the slate-colored crust. With its suggestion of deterioration and failure the little farm presented the dreariest aspect imaginable, and Odell was turning back when his eye was attracted by something bright which had caught upon one of the twigs of the hedge just where the path led through the gap. It was a huge red woolen mitten, much worn and of obvious home manufacture, for the misshapen thumb had been badly turned and unskillful attempts had been made to draw the torn palm together.

While Odell stood examining it a door at the rear of the house opened creakingly, and a little girl ap-

peared staggering beneath the weight of two pails which seemed about to pull her thin arms from their sockets. On a sudden impulse the detective thrust the mitten into the pocket of his overcoat and crossing the road pushed open a gate which hung by one hinge and entered the yard.

The child had approached the larger of the sheds from which the quacking of fowl emanated, but as he advanced she set her pails down upon the ground and awaited his coming stolidly. When he was quite close to her she raised her eyes gravely to his without a trace of shyness, and he saw that they were a clear, limpid gray and so large as almost to swallow up the pallid little face.

"We haven't any eggs to sell," she announced primly. "The ducks ain't laying hardly at all yet, and Daddy wants to keep them for hatching."

Odell smiled.

"I haven't come about eggs today," he said. "Those are pretty heavy pails for you to carry, aren't they?"

"Nope," she responded. "I always feed the ducks, but I've just had measles and I ain't strong yet. Most everybody's had it at school; it's the first time in my life I ever had anything the other kids did!"

She spoke with distinct pride untinged by any note of self-pity, and the unconscious pathos of it stung Odell; but he put the softening influence sternly from him.

"Do you live here alone with your father?" he asked.

"Mostly." She turned toward the house. "Do you want him?"

"No." Odell drew the mitten from his pocket. "I thought perhaps this belonged to someone in your house; I found it over there in the pasture."

"Oh!" The child pounced upon it with a delighted cry. "It's Daddy's! I looked for it all the morning—!"

"What is dis?" A gruff, guttural voice broke in upon her childish treble, and a gaunt, bent-shouldered man with a surly, lowering gaze came around the corner of the nearest shed. "What you want?"

"Oh, Daddy, the man found your mitten that's been lost all day!" the little girl exclaimed, holding it out to him. "Now you won't get your hands all frost-bit before I can knit another pair!"

The man took the mitten in silence and turned it over with trembling, clumsy hands. At length he looked up surlily.

"Where you find dis?" he demanded.

"In the Willow Brook pasture, just across the road—" Odell was beginning, but the other cut him short.

"It ain't mine!" he declared, thrusting it out as though in sudden resentment. "I ain't been over there. What for you come here, anyway?"

"But it is yours, Daddy!" the little girl insisted, rescuing it before it reached Odell's hand. "Look, there's where I mended it only yesterday—!"

"Hold your tongue!" The man turned on her in a low-voiced fury. "Always I say it, you are getting too fresh for your years! Do I not my own things know? Throw down that mitten and go in the house. I will the ducks feed.—And you! You take yourself off!"

He made an awkward, threatening gesture at Odell, but the latter merely smiled once more.

"There's nothing to get mad about, is there?" he asked coolly. "What's the harm if you did use that short cut through Latimer's place? He never kicked, did he?"

The man eyed him suspiciously.

"That short cut I have used for many years, but now since the new people come I go around by the road. What is it to you that you bring here that dirty mitten? That child, she talks silly; it is not mine!"

"Well, it's nothing to me." Odell shrugged. "I suppose you've heard the news?"

"Never is there news, and I want none of it!" the other retorted savagely. "My own business I mind, and other peoples better mind theirs! Peaceable I am, and I ask nothings of nobody but to be let alone!—Get along with you!"

"Then you don't know that Latimer has been murdered?" Odell asked casually, ignoring the rough command.

"Murdered!" The man stood as though dazed for a moment. Then his chin with its bristling beard was thrust slowly outward as he brought his eyes nearer and nearer to those of Odell, in a gaze of incredulity in which horror gradually dawned. "What devil's talk is dis?"

"It is true, Vorn," Odell replied quietly. "He was killed last night down by the pond. It's a wonder you didn't see the body when you passed that way."

"Me!" The man threw up his arms as he retreated a step or two, and in his threadbare short-coat he looked like some gaunt scare-crow. "But I did not pass that way, I am telling you! I go by the village, yes, but I do not use the short cut! Today I have work to do, I stay by my house; my little girl can tell you! How should I hear if that man is dead?"

His guttural tones had risen wildly, but it was not that which caused Odell to stare at him for a moment in silence. The unconscious gesture with which Vorn had repudiated the suggestion of his possible presence at the scene of the murder had brought back vividly to the younger man's mind a totally different picture which had been described to him. Could Vorn have been the central figure in that?

"News usually travels fast in the country," Odell responded with a laugh and turned as though to go, but halted. "As long as that mitten isn't yours, will you ask your little girl to give it back to me?"

Vorn stood rubbing his ear in obvious perplexity and suspicion, and finally he demanded:

"What you want it for? A dirty, worn-out thing that some tramp dropped?"

"Because we're going to find that tramp, and we'll need that mitten as evidence against him," Odell replied with an assumption of candor. "I'm working with Sheriff Pettingill to find out who killed Latimer, and the man who dropped that mitten passed by the pond either in the late afternoon or the evening. If it was in the afternoon, of course, he couldn't have known anything about it, for Latimer wasn't killed

until around nine o'clock at night, or maybe a little later; but if he passed after that he couldn't have helped stumbling over the body."

He waited expectantly, but Vorn shook his head.

"A red mitten is a red mitten," he said stubbornly. "Nothings can you prove by it, young feller, where everybody wears them. It is not mine and I will get it for you."

He turned toward the house, and Odell frowned. The man was not so stupid as he appeared, and there was a modicum of truth in his contention. It might be difficult indeed to prove the ownership of an article the like of which was in general use throughout the locality, provided that its mate could not be produced. Vorn had admitted going to the village sometime on the previous day, but perhaps he realized that his presence there could be proven.

The early winter dusk was gathering as the house door opened once more and Vorn reappeared with the woolen mitten which he thrust into Odell's hand.

"There! Now take yourself off! Not the sheriff himself has right on my land, for I am honest, I obey the law. I know nothings of the man Latimer or his death! What is it to me?"

"You said you went to the village yesterday—?"

"In the afternoon, yes, but I go and come back around by the road! Plenty peoples tell you Chris Vorn, he is crank, yes! He has no friends, he wants that he should be let alone, but a liar he is not! Three, four times maybe this winter I have used the short cut, but not once in the last month; where I am not wanted

there I do not go! Give the mitten to the sheriff and tell him that Chris Vorn says 'may devil take him'!"

Without a backward glance he turned and stumped into the house again, banging the door behind him; but as Odell went through the rickety little gate once more and crossed the road he felt a vague but insistent consciousness of eyes watching him from those blank, unlighted windows he had left behind.

That the mitten was indeed Vorn's Odell did not doubt, for the child's identification had been sure, and corroborated by her father's attitude if not by his words. It might be a simple matter to prove that he had been in the village during the afternoon, but if he had used the short cut then, why had he denied the fact even when assured that no suspicion could be attached to him for his presence on the Latimer property at that time?

Could there have been bad blood between Latimer and himself? When he had flung out his arms in that wild gesture, the picture it recalled to Odell's mind was that of the man without an overcoat who had leaped in front of Latimer's car on the way back from the station late the previous afternoon, whom Curry, the chauffeur, had mentioned. Vorn was morose and excitable, and according to the sheriff embittered against the world because of a domestic tragedy. Was he also a trifle mad?

When Odell reached the Latimer house once more the sheriff was waiting in his car with the engine running and lamps lighted.

"Where in the world have you been?" the latter

grumbled. "I've been down to the pond looking for you, but you weren't in sight. What have you got there?"

For Odell had stooped and was examining in the rays from the lamps a shapeless red object which he held in his hands. After a moment he straightened and remarked with a rueful laugh:

"I've been nabbing city crooks for a matter of six years, John, and I had to come out here to be tricked by a farmer! You've an old country saying about 'getting the mitten,' haven't you? Well, I've got it all right, but it's not the one I had before! I've been buncoed!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHADOWS

THE ride back to the sheriff's home was a comparatively silent one, for Barry Odell had laughingly declined to explain yet where and how he had come into possession of the red mitten, and the older man seemed enveloped in an air of grim self-confidence which he maintained throughout supper.

When the meal was finished, however, the latter suggested to the city detective that they go over to the coroner's and learn how his individual investigation was progressing, since no word had come from him, and Odell assented with alacrity. The village practitioner's shrewd analysis of Mrs. Latimer's mental reaction following the discovery of the tragedy had made him curious as to the stand the official would take at the inquest.

They found Dr. Hale in the small room back of his combined office and "parlor" which served as a laboratory pacing the floor deep in thought; and when his elderly maiden sister showed them in he greeted them with an abstracted nod and spoke as though continuing a conversation which had been uninterrupted between them.

"If the object were heavy enough, a light blow

would have done the trick; but of course it would have had to be pretty hefty—”

“What on earth are you getting at, Doc?” The sheriff seated himself and putting his hat on the floor beside him reached in his pocket for a cigar. “What trick? Caved Latimer’s skull in, you mean?”

Odell’s quick eyes darting around the room had lighted upon the anchor lying on a plain deal table in the corner, and he nodded in comprehension.

“That occurred to me, too,” he observed. “The sharp point of that fluke would have gone in like a harpoon.”

“Exactly.” The genial, elderly face of the doctor beamed upon him, and then the latter turned to the sheriff. “That was dried blood all right on the anchor, John; human blood, at that; and yet I am not satisfied that it was the weapon with which the murder was committed. The autopsy showed that Latimer had been dealt a blow that might have been heavy or comparatively light, the strength behind it depending upon the weight of the instrument used. The fluke of that anchor is so sharp that if it had been brought down with all the strength of an angry or desperate man it would have been likely to have split Latimer’s head clean in two!”

“But you said yourself—” began the sheriff.

“That it must have taken a powerful blow with a sharp-edged instrument?” Dr. Hale interrupted. “I know I did, but I’d only had a chance for a superficial examination then. The frontal and left temporal were cracked like an egg-shell, but the wound was more

crushing that penetrating. A child could have done it with a sledge-hammer, provided any child could have had the strength to lift such a thing, do you see?"

"Then what *was* he killed with if it wasn't the anchor, and how did the blood get on it?" the sheriff demanded. "What's become of the weapon?"

"Who killed Cock Robin?" retorted the coroner good-naturedly. "Not that anybody seems to be claiming the honor of the achievement in this case, but we've got more questions to answer than that before we get at the truth. I've set ten o'clock tomorrow morning at the Latimer house for the inquest, and sent the body back this afternoon. Have you boys stirred up anything?"

"You got the bag and the fur coat with the piece torn from it that I sent over to you by the constable?" Pettingill asked.

The coroner nodded gravely.

"Yes, John. I've had a talk with Bangs, too, and those visitors who arrived this afternoon; the lawyer and that brother and sister named Agnew. I don't know yet what steps you've taken in the matter, but nobody'll leave the Latimer place tonight; I've seen to that. You didn't get much from Hi Claggett at the station, did you?"

While the sheriff and Dr. Hale compared notes Odell allowed his attention to wander about the room. It was a curious, homely place, and there appeared to be an odd sort of methodical arrangement even in its apparent disorder which shed an illuminating side-light on the character of its occupant. Every inch of

wall space within reach was covered with shelves filled with vials and retorts, and upon a long table beside the sink antiquated paraphernalia of an earlier medical school hobnobbed with some of the latest inventions and surgical appliances which to the detective's knowledge had been introduced only recently in the hospitals of the city. Evidently this country doctor in the simple, monotonous round of his daily practice had not permitted himself to rust. So far as his limited resources availed, he had kept abreast of his profession at least.

The moleskin coat which Mrs. Latimer had worn that morning was spread carefully across a chair in the corner, and the bag that he himself had fished from the brook was open on the floor beside the deal table on which its former contents, together with the anchor, had been placed. Odell's gaze caught also the glint of gold and platinum trinkets and a little heap of coins, and he was on the point of rising and strolling over to examine them more closely when a remark of the sheriff's arrested him.

"But the man with the cough who was talking to Latimer at the station wasn't seen after the eighty went through to the city. Strangers can't get around this part of the country much without being remarked, especially in winter. I should think it was pretty certain he beat it away on that train."

"Nobody saw him come, yet he was there; and as far as I have been able to find out, nobody saw Latimer between the station and his own home grounds, but he didn't fly to the pond in one of his own airplanes,"

the coroner retorted with a smile. "I've got a report from the conductor of the eight-fifty last night, and he says nobody got on board of her here. According to the station-master the only person to arrive in Sunnymead at all yesterday whom he didn't know was a fellow in an ulster and an old felt hat who swung off the four o'clock from the junction and started due west, up Marsh Road, without a word to anybody as though he knew where he was bound. You know as well as I do that Marsh Road leads directly away from the village and the direction of the Latimer place."

"Could you get any description of the man at all, Doctor, except the hat and coat that he wore?" Odell intervened.

"Only that he was middle-aged but strong-looking; the station-master thought he was a workingman of some sort," Hale replied. "You haven't heard anything about him, have you, Sergeant?"

"No." Odell shook his head, but the light of awakened interest which had come into his eyes did not dim. "Have you a map showing the roads in the immediate vicinity of Sunnymead?"

"It's somewhere among these old booklets." The coroner began rummaging in a drawer of the battered desk by the window. "Here it is; automobile road map of North Shore County. I guess that'll show you what you want. It's the man who talked to Latimer at the station that I'd like to get, and if you remember, Hi Claggett said he wore an overcoat and a derby, like any city man; that seems to let the workman out. I've sent everywhere up and down the line inquiring

for him, but I'm afraid it'll have to stand till the inquest is over. We can't expect any definite verdict, with only that evidence over there to go on."

He gestured toward the deal table in the corner, and Odell drew slowly from his pocket the red mitten.

"Not being officially connected with the investigation, I thought it would be fair game to keep this to myself until I had satisfied my own doubts concerning it," he remarked as he handed it over for inspection. "However, I'll tell you about it on condition that you will give me until half an hour before the inquest to look into the matter unhindered; I'll meet you then, Doctor, and put you in possession of whatever further facts I may have been able to discover in the meantime."

He told of what had happened from the finding of the mitten to his interview with the taciturn Vorn, and the coroner and sheriff listened with keen interest. When he had finished, the latter observed:

"Chris has been grouchy and queer for a long time, but I don't think he's crazy, and there could be only one reason for his exchanging the mittens like that; there must have been something on the first one that you didn't notice."

"Blood, maybe?" The coroner started and then shrugged. "Vorn's an ignorant fellow and surly, but I don't believe he's dangerous. I'd like a look at that other mitten, but I suppose it was in the stove before you got back to the Latimer place. If he passed through the south pasture in the afternoon, he is probably afraid to admit it for fear he'll be dragged into

this in some way. Wish you would find out all you can about it, Sergeant."

"I'll do my best," the young man replied as he slipped the road map into his pocket. He was on the point once more of rising when the sheriff asked:

"Going to put Mrs. Latimer on the stand tomorrow, Doc?"

"Of course, if she is well enough to testify." Dr. Hale stared. "I mean to find out how that piece of fur came to be hanging on a branch in that clump of holly trees."

"We-ell," the sheriff smiled slowly, and the look of grim significance which Odell had observed earlier returned to his lean countenance. "If you can kind of get around to it, find out how well she knows these Agnews and what she thinks of them, particularly the brother, Starr Agnew."

"What's that?" The coroner sat back in his chair.

"I don't take much stock in a man on a station platform who can't be found after a certain train has pulled out, but I do in a torn piece of fur practically on the scene of the murder, especially when we've got the garment it belonged to, and the word of a witness that he knocked for nearly ten minutes on a locked door without getting any response from inside. You said that a child could have struck that blow which killed Latimer if it could have lifted anything heavy enough to do the trick. There's the anchor, and you admit that there was human blood on it. A child mightn't have lifted it to the height of Latimer's head, but a woman could, and she might have put just

enough strength in the blow to crush his forehead."

"Hold on there, John!" the coroner exclaimed, and his genial face had become very grave. "I know what you're driving at, of course, but it's a pretty nasty job to accuse a delicate, sensitive woman—"

"Oh, Lord!" Pettingill cried impatiently. "That's the sentimental tomfoolery that has made women think they can do anything and get away with it by making eyes at the jury! I'm talking facts!"

"So am I," the coroner returned equably. "I haven't been a doctor for thirty years for nothing, John, and I know what neurotic, hysterical women are capable of; but where's the motive? Granted that Latimer was from all accounts a good deal of a brute and she wasn't over happy, there isn't any reason for her to have taken his life! She could have gone back with her two old servants to where she came from, and if he pestered her, got a legal separation."

"Separation don't mean freedom." The sheriff chewed vigorously on his unlighted cigar. "You were with me, Barry, when I talked to her this morning. Did she give me a direct answer when I put it to her straight if she knew of anyone who might want him out of the way? She looked me in the eye and asked me who could wish it! I think I'm getting to the answer to it now, and whoever killed Latimer, man or woman, is going to pay for it so long as I'm sheriff of this county! There isn't going to be any mawkishness about this case, nor any fool made of me! Suppose she wanted her freedom for a fresh start that she'd maybe passed up before or didn't realize until it was too late?"

I guess we've found out enough about Latimer's character to know that he wouldn't give up anything that belonged to him without a fight, and he'd put up a good one! This afternoon when you had gone down to the pond I had another talk with Starr Agnew, and from one thing and another I gathered that he's in love with Mrs. Latimer and always was. He said in your hearing, Barry, that Latimer's death was 'shocking,' but he didn't then or later make the slightest pretense at regret over it; and do you remember the very first question he asked us after the lawyer had left him alone with us?"

Odell nodded.

"He asked how Mrs. Latimer was."

"Exactly. Nothing about the murder, nor how it happened, nor anything! His first thought was of her! I guess he didn't know what I was driving at when I talked with him later, and he gave himself dead away. Latimer's dead and she's free; that one fact was too big in his own eyes for him to begin to bother with details yet, and he's taken it for granted that the educated Chinaman or some other of Latimer's enemies did it. No, if we can sound her and find out whether she cares for him or not—"

"And how she knew that Latimer was going to turn back from the station last night, and why she went out in the cold and waited for him by the pond when she had plenty of time and opportunity to kill him comfortably in the house if she had wanted to, and trump up some burglary story!" the coroner interrupted. "You might as well figure that Agnew was

the man at the station last night, and followed him home and knocked him on the head!"

"I know it." The sheriff smiled again. "The motive would have been the same. That idea occurred to me, too, with such force that I've sent a wire to the city to have Mr. Starr Agnew's movements last night looked up pretty thoroughly! The only thing Hi Claggett noticed about the fellow at the station last night besides his hat and coat was that he had a nasty kind of a cough; so has Agnew."

"So has every second person you meet, in such weather as this!" the coroner remarked. "I could have made my everlasting fortune this winter if I'd been a quack! I talked with Agnew, too, remember, and as you say he doesn't make any pretense of grief over Latimer's death; but neither has anybody else. Agnew's straightforward and clean-cut; if he'd had murder on his soul he wouldn't have talked to you with such unguarded frankness, John. That's your answer. If he turns out to have been the man at the station, I'll listen to your theory; but just now I think he's out of it even if he does care for Mrs. Latimer, as you believe."

"And Mrs. Latimer?" the sheriff asked. "You'd know if she was used to taking drugs, wouldn't you? If she wasn't, why couldn't that butler make her hear when he pounded on her door? And can you get away from that piece of fur torn from her coat?"

"No, and I'm not going to get away from the last person Latimer was seen with alive, either!" retorted Dr. Hale. "This isn't the first time you and I have

looked at a case from different angles, John. Sometimes you were right and sometimes I was, and sometimes we were both barking up wrong trees; but if this wasn't an official matter I'd lay you a nice little wager on it!"

The sheriff rose and Odell followed suit.

"All right," the former said. "We'll be at the inquest tomorrow and see what that brings out; but take a little tip from me, Doc—watch Mrs. Latimer's face when you spring that torn coat on her! 'Night!"

As they trudged back toward the sheriff's home Odell asked:

"Has Vorn got any relatives? His little girl told me that she and her father lived alone mostly."

"'Mostly?'" Pettingill echoed. "There ain't a soul on earth belonging to him besides that kid that I know of, and you saw yourself how cordial he'd be likely to be to company. There hasn't been anybody else around his place that I've heard of since his wife ran away about five years ago, and I heard that she'd died out West, somewhere. — Here, where're you going?"

"I won't be in just yet, if you don't mind," he smiled. "You told me to take a hand in this case in my own way, you know. Don't let Mrs. Pettingill worry or leave the door on the latch, for I may not be in all night. A thaw's set in, anyway, so I won't freeze to death, and I want to satisfy myself about something."

"You and Doc Hale!" the sheriff chuckled. "Still hanging on to the idea of that red mitten, are you?"

Well, look out if you go prowling around the Latimer place that some one of the deputies don't take a pot shot at you in the dark! I'll bet Doc's got the grounds policed, and I know I sent a few of the boys out there myself at sundown to keep an eye on things. If you don't show up by breakfast time I'll come and look for you; can't trust you city detectives around these desperate parts by yourselves."

With a laughing wave of his hand he turned up the street toward his own home, and Odell continued on alone. The thaw of which he had spoken was apparent not only in the mildness of the air but in the melting of the hard crust which had covered the snow. Trees and the eaves of the already darkened houses dripped in an incessant, multitudinous tinkle, and now and then there came the soft rushing impact of a miniature snowslide from some slanting roof.

The inhabitants of Sunnymead had evidently talked themselves out for the time being on the subject of the murder and had retired, for no light, except the infrequent street lamps, shone before any door on Main Street until he came to the drugstore.

Here a brilliant ray cut across the sidewalk, and through the show-window Odell could see a sleepy-eyed clerk engaged in shutting up shop. He paused and drawing from his pocket the road map which the coroner had given him, he scanned it hastily.

Having located the county seat it was a simple matter to trace Marsh Road winding westward from the station, and an ejaculation escaped him as he saw that it skirted the village and crossed a minor road which

ran due east to the south of the road upon which the Latimer place was situated and almost parallel with it. That second, narrower road must pass the front of Vorn's duck farm and other small dwellings, and it was to avoid that long detour, in all probabilities, that the short cut through the then Hopewell property had first come into use.

The light within the drugstore was extinguished suddenly, but Odell had learned all that he desired; and folding the map he returned it to his pocket and struck out once more, past the deserted station and along Marsh road.

He soon learned how that thoroughfare had come by its name, for passing the closely huddled frame cottages of this evidently poorer outlying section of the village he found himself in a region of scattered homesteads which rose on either hand from dank, frozen swamplands. The outlines of the houses were plainly visible against the lesser darkness of the sky, and when Odell had trudged for the better part of two miles, as accurately as he could judge, upon the narrower turnpike into which he had turned from Marsh Road, he began to scrutinize each dwelling on his left as he neared it, trying to recall the general contour of the ramshackle Vorn cottage as he had seen it from the rear in the afternoon.

He need have had no fear of missing it even in the darkness, for as he at length approached the low, sagging-roofed house with its huddled sheds on the edge of the marsh the subdued, sleepy quacking and stir of innumerable ducks reached his ears.

No light had been visible from any of the farmhouses which he had passed for the last half hour or more, but from between the broken shutters of a tiny side window of the Vorn dwelling a faint, flickering ray stole across the darkness. Odell left the road and crept toward it.

There were no trees in the bare side yard, but irregular clumps of ragged bushes screened his approach from any possible watchful eye, and his footsteps made no sound on the softening snow.

The sill of the window was about a foot above his head as he stood beneath it, but an old wooden tub lay near. Overturning it, Odell stepped up on it and put his eye to the rift in the shutter. The glass pane of the window had long since been broken, but a cheap shade of light paper had been drawn carefully down over the opening; and all that met his gaze was a blank expanse of dim light which flared fitfully like a guttering candle.

He heard the low, muttering rumble of Vorn's voice and wondered for an instant if the man could be talking to himself. Then all at once there came a stir within the room, the light fluttered, and two shadows appeared against the blind; the shapes of two tall, stoop-shouldered, shambling figures, strangely alike, which faced each other against the candle's flickering gleam.

CHAPTER X.

THE INQUEST

BY NINE o'clock the next morning, although the thaw had rendered the roads almost impassable, every route which led in the direction of the Latimer place was clogged with rattling motors and straining teams, and with difficulty a path was forced up the driveway for the sheriff's small car. Pettingill and Odell were admitted to the house by the constable, who had been standing guard at the front door.

"Doc Hale's waiting for you in the library," the latter announced. "I never saw such a crowd! The whole country's here a'ready, and more a-coming!"

"Has the Latimer lawyer returned yet this morning?" the sheriff asked.

"Both of them, senior and junior," replied Wex Price. "That young lady visitor that came yesterday, Miss Agnew, stayed over night and she's with Mrs. Latimer now, I guess. Her brother went back to the city with Mr. Crewe on the six o'clock train last evening and came out with him and the older lawyer an hour ago. I guess maybe you'll find them with the coroner in the library now."

But they found Dr. Hale alone, pacing up and down before the hearth in his customary abstraction. He halted as they entered and closed the door carefully behind them.

"What the dickens did you two mean by that 'phone message this morning?" he demanded. "Who's this fellow you've got in jail, and what has Chris Vorn and his red mitten to do with the case, after all?"

"That's for you to find out, Doc!" the sheriff chuckled. "You are running the show today. About the man in jail, he's Chris Vorn's brother, Conrad. We've got that much out of him, or rather Barry Odell has; I'm not taking any credit for it. Conrad Vorn is the man who got off the four o'clock train on the afternoon before the murder."

"You remember, Doctor, that the sheriff told you of our conversation with Mr. Crewe, the junior member of the law firm which acted for Mr. Latimer?" Odell asked, and at the coroner's nod he went on: "Mr. Crewe was very anxious to know if among the effects found on the body or in the bag there was a certain document."

"I remember," Dr. Hale remarked.

"You know that according to Mr. Crewe this document was not to be found yesterday in the house, and when the sheriff and I fished the bag up from the brook its contents bore every appearance of having been pretty thoroughly ransacked," Odell continued, drawing from his pocket a thick wad of crumpled sheets of paper bound in a pale blue cover which bore marks of obviously rough handling. "The constable told us just now that Mr. Crewe arrived an hour ago."

"Yes." The coroner stared. "Do you mean to say that is the missing document?"

"I would like Mr. Crewe's opinion on that point, with

your approval, Doctor," responded Odell. "I wrested this from Conrad Vorn's possession last night."

"Then it was he who searched the bag and dropped it into the brook!" the coroner exclaimed. "If he did that—!"

"Perhaps, if he wore his brother's mittens." Odell smiled. "Much against his inclination, Chris Vorn has been brought over from his duck farm and is under guard of a deputy in the garage waiting his turn to appear before you at the inquest."

"But this can't be the paper Crewe was after! I understood you to say that he described it as being typewritten; these papers look more if the letters on them had been printed with a very fine brush by hand, and there are some crude drawings here, besides!"

"A camel's hair brush and India ink. If you remember, Crewe claimed that he obtained merely a glimpse of it. Those crude drawings resemble mechanical plans of some sort, I think, and recalling Latimer's own statement to Crewe that they were of importance in connection with some work now in progress in his factories, it is safe to infer that they are designs, in part at least, of the small 'flivver' planes upon which the manufacturer's hopes were centered."

Dr. Hale stepped to the door and called the constable, who appeared with suspicious promptitude.

"Wex, will you find Mr. Crewe and ask him to step here for a moment?" When the door had closed again he added: "Whatever this document is, it seems to be an original; I wonder why Mr. Latimer didn't have copies made of it, if it is of such importance?"

"It may be that he did not care to trust it to anyone else even for a time," Odell responded.

A light tap at the door announced the arrival of Mr. Crewe, who entered and stood gazing from one to another of them with an expectant air not untinged with anxiety.

"Mr. Crewe." The coroner advanced. "You mentioned yesterday a certain document which was missing from the effects of your late client. May I ask if you have discovered it?"

"No, sir. I have not."

"Is this it?" Dr. Hale held out the blue-covered sheaf of papers and the other started forward.

"Yes!" he cried eagerly and held out his hand for it; then as if realizing the precipitancy of his action he drew back cautiously. "At least, it resembles closely the document which Mr. Latimer displayed in our office on Tuesday. You have examined it?"

"Yes, and the same privilege will be extended to you after the inquest, which will shortly be held," the coroner responded. "Your statement that this resembles closely the document which you then saw is all that I desire from you at the present moment."

Mr. Crewe did not accept or even resent the hint.

"It resembles it merely as one conventionally bound document resembles another," he demurred. "I may have been over hasty in my partial identification. I should prefer not to be placed on record—"

"You shall not be, Mr. Crewe." The coroner folded the document and placed it on the mantel beside the torch. "I am ready now to proceed with the inquest."

There was nothing for the attorney to do but to withdraw, and Dr. Hale, together with the sheriff and Odell, after the latter had told the others something more of his experience of the previous night, repaired to the drawing-room, which, together with the dining-room which opened from it, was packed with the morbidly curious inhabitants of the neighborhood.

Taking his place behind a table at a cleared space at one end of the room, the coroner opened proceedings by picking a jury at random from among the villagers and farmers who formed the audience. When they had viewed the body he turned to Wex Price, who with preternatural gravity wreathing his countenance stood at one side, and ordered:

“Call Jimmie Vail.”

Jimmie Vail was duly sworn and testified to the finding of the body. He was corroborated by his mother and Sam Jenks, the latter attesting to its identification as that of Gilbert Latimer, and they were followed in turn by the gardener and chauffeur, the testimony of neither of whom brought out the slightest fresh detail.

There was a little expectant stir among the spectators when Mrs. Latimer was called and she entered from the hall clad in a straight black gown which emphasized her slenderness and habitual pallor. Her small head with its bands of dull gold hair was held proudly erect, and her calm, blue eyes fixed themselves upon the coroner as though she were unconscious of the presence of the others.

The bevy of reporters from the metropolitan dailies

scribbled madly, and the country folk stared with all their eyes; but her testimony was devoid of sensation, being under the coroner's shrewd, benevolent guidance a mere repetition of what she had already told of her movements on the night of the murder and the previous day.

Thinking her examination over, she had turned as though to leave the stand when Dr. Hale leaned forward suddenly.

"Mrs. Latimer, when were you last in the vicinity of the pond, near the scene of your husband's death, previous to the discovery of his body?" The coroner spoke sternly as though having done with fencing, and a little gasp like a prolonged sigh ran around the crowded room while the woman in the witness chair turned a shade more pale. But she held her head still proudly erect and her eyes did not waver as she replied:

"I cannot remember; certainly not since the last heavy snowstorm made walking difficult. Before that I frequently strolled about the grounds."

"Sheriff." The coroner turned to Pettingill, who was seated just behind him. "You know the fur coat there?"

For answer the sheriff produced the moleskin coat with its torn side turned carefully inward, and while the crowd gaped Dr. Hale held the garment out to the witness, but just beyond her reach.

"Mrs. Latimer, do you identify this?"

Instinctively she extended her hands toward it and then drew back, moistening her lips with the tip of her tongue.

"Yes, it is mine. At least I think that it is. I have a moleskin coat—" Her voice died away in her throat and for the first time her eyes wavered. "Of course it must be mine! But I have not worn it in some time; I have not been out of the house except in the car for more than a fortnight—!"

As though conscious that her protest was ill-timed, she caught herself up abruptly and waited in a tense silence for the next question, but it was not forthcoming. Instead, the coroner nodded gravely.

"That will do, Mrs. Latimer. You are excused. Sergeant Odell!"

In a daze Mrs. Latimer rose and turned, her eyes searching the curious, eager faces clustered close about until they came to rest upon those of an elderly man of imposing bearing and a mass of snow-white hair falling over a high, prominent forehead who stepped forward and offered her his arm.

He led her from the room as Odell advanced, and the latter observed that they were joined in the doorway by Crewe. Evidently the elderly stranger was Lefferts, the senior member of the law firm which had acted for Latimer and now represented his widow.

The young detective, being sworn, testified to the torn fragment of fur which he had found hanging on the holly branch, and before the staring eyes of the jury and the spectators it was fitted into the rent in the coat. The murmur which followed was rising to a hubbub when the coroner sternly demanded silence and created a diversion by producing the bag and draw-

ing from Odell the story of its recovery from the brook.

Proceedings thereafter slumped once more in interest for a time as the Sergeant was followed by Bangs; the housemaid, Ruth Oliver; Maggie Ruggles; and Hiram Claggett, the station-master. During the noon recess which immediately followed the latter's testimony, the jury was herded off by itself into the reception room and the coroner gesticulated toward it hopelessly.

"I told you!" he addressed the sheriff. "They're mixed enough on the testimony as it stands now, but what with the good lunch which Bangs is stuffing them with at the present moment and after they hear Chris Vorn and his brother dodge the issue, as they're bound to do, about the only fact the jury will settle on is that Latimer is dead, and that because they've seen the body!"

"I don't know," the sheriff responded thoughtfully. "Next to the weather, about the most uncertain thing I know of is a jury. I've known them to spring some surprises in my time, and I guess you have, too, eh, Barry?"

Odell nodded.

"You're handing them a lot of seemingly unrelated facts and uncorroborated statements, which can't be helped under the circumstances, and you can scarcely hope for any definite result."

They lunched hastily and when the inquest was resumed the first witness called was Christopher Vorn. He took his place with a lowering, sullen air which

did not change as he muttered a guttural response to the oath administered to him and shot a malignant glance toward Odell, who had once more taken up his stand in the background among the spectators.

"Chris," the coroner began unceremoniously, "you knew Mr. Latimer?"

"Sure, I knew him by sight, and I spoke to him once." There was surly defiance in his tone.

"When was this? On what occasion?"

"When he ordered me off his land not a month ago! No harm was I doing, but he said that we who live on the back road may no longer go by the short cut to the village. Always the Hopewells were willing, glad that we use that narrow path through the south pasture that cuts off more than a mile and saves time that is money for us who work, but *he* must come and buy this place and say that we must not put foot upon it!"

"Do you mean that you quarreled with him?" the coroner asked quickly, but Chris shrugged.

"Why should I quarrel? He is right, the land is his. I just tell him that I come no more where I am not wanted, and I keep my word. When I have need to go to the village or my little girl, she goes by the school, it is the road we use; the neighbors, they can tell you that!" He squared his shoulders and gazed out over the crowded room. "By myself I keep, asking favors of no man, but none can say that I have set foot on land that is not mine since that time!"

Despite the truculence of his tone there was an unconscious, clannish appeal in his words which struck a chord among the gaping villagers, and here and there

a voice arose: "Chris is right! He ain't used the short cut! I seen him myself goin' 'round by the road more'n once!"

The coroner pounded sharply on the table before him.

"Silence, or I'll have the room cleared!—Now, Chris, when was the last time you went to the village?"

"The day before yesterday, Tuesday. Feed for my ducks I need, and flour and brown sugar and a new length of stove-pipe. Plenty peoples, they see me; by the back road I go, both ways."

"You went in the afternoon?"

"Late, yes. Almost is it supper time when I get home."

"What did you wear on your hands?"

The suspicion of a crafty smile lighted the dull features for an instant, and then they resumed their habitual stolidity.

"Nothing. My mittens, they have been lost since the day before when I go to gather wood along the shore. By the rocks I leave them and forget, and it must be that the tide carries them out. I do not miss them until the next day, and my little girl, she cannot find them around the house. Such a business to be made about a pair of old mittens!"

"Then you went to the village and back on Tuesday afternoon barehanded, Chris?" The coroner bent forward. "You swear to that?"

"Sure I swear to it! That smart feller who came around yesterday afternoon—!"

"Wait a minute. When you got home on Tuesday

afternoon, whom did you find in your house besides your daughter?"

"My brother Conrad." Chris shifted in his chair and his voice lowered.

"Did you expect him?"

"No."

"What did he come for?"

The man's glowering temper suddenly flamed out.

"What for would he come? He is my only living relative besides the child! Why should he not want to see us, to pay us a visit?"

The coroner paid no heed to the impertinence of the retort. Instead, he demanded suddenly in a tone which brooked no evasion:

"Chris, where does your brother Conrad work?"

For an instant a tide of crimson flooded the heavy, lowering face, and it was averted from the public gaze. The next, Chris had straightened, gripping both arms of his chair, and flung back his head defiantly.

"Conrad, he works in Mr. Latimer's factory, in New Jersey!"

CHAPTER XL

THE VERDICT

THE CORONER quelled the incipient riot of excitement which followed Chris's revelation and asked:

"Didn't he come to visit you in order to get something which Mr. Latimer had? Didn't he mention it to you?"

"If he did, I did not hear him." Chris's small eyes narrowed to a mere slit. "I do not remember that anything was talked of last night except family matters until all at once a man he breaks in through my window! He comes so quick that I do not see it is that young feller from the sheriff's office. I think it is a thief, a robber, and when I go for him he knocks me by my head and I don't know nothings more. For that, Mr. Coroner, there shall be damages! When I wake up I am tied with my own clothes line and my brother too, and that crazy young feller, he talk a lot of nonsense I don't know nothings about! I am a respectable man, I mind my own business, why should I be so treated?"

He spread his hands out in an injured fashion, and his tone was that of one bewildered and maligned; but his eyes furtively swept the jury and then darted toward the door. It was obvious that to the best of his ability he was playing safe for himself in spite

of what his brother had disclosed or might still disclose.

"You say that you and your brother were discussing family matters, Chris; what family matters? Do you deny that he wanted to go away and you tried to prevent him, that you were afraid to have him seen leaving your house?"

"No!" Chris snarled. "And for why? Because in the afternoon that same smart young feller come by my house with a red mitten, and my little girl says it is mine. Then he says it is found on Latimer's place and that Latimer is dead, murdered! It is not my mitten, and I have not been on the land which Latimer owns, but I am a poor man with no friends, and I make no secret that I am angry the short cut is closed. That smart young city feller with the big head, he wants to make for himself a name out here, he is ready to say that I, an honest man, killed Latimer! If he knows that my brother works for Latimer and he sees him leaving my house at night like he was running away from somethings, he will try to say next that Conrad did it! I want no trouble, I tell my brother better he lose another day's work than that we get mixed up in somethings we know nothings about!"

"Chris, have you ever seen this before?" The coroner suddenly produced the crumpled, blue-covered sheaf of papers, and in spite of himself the witness shrank back slightly in his chair.

"That young city feller, he showed me one like that last night, but I don't know nothings about it!" he muttered. "I never seen it before!"

"How about this?" The coroner reached beneath the

table and then held out the anchor. "When did you last have this in your hand?"

Slowly Chris Vorn's weatherbeaten face whitened, but he shook his head stubbornly once more.

"Never! It is for boats, and plenty of them have I seen down by the shore, but mostly bigger." He was breathing heavily and now he swallowed with a visible effort. "Never have I had it in my hand!"

Tenaciously the coroner continued his questioning, but Chris refused to be drawn out further. He was at length permitted to leave the stand, although the constable did not immediately remove him from the room but waved him to a chair against the wall apart from the spectators, where he sat in stolid resentment.

The next witness called proved a surprise to the sheriff and Odell as well as the others.

"Edward Bemis."

A small man, slightly bald, stepped forward spryly. He deposed that he was the remaining partner and now sole proprietor of Bemis & Son, Hardware and Household Furnishings, of Sunnymead, that Christopher Vorn entered his store between four and five o'clock on the afternoon of the previous Tuesday and purchased from him personally a length of stove-piping, and furthermore that the said Christopher Vorn was at the time wearing a pair of red worsted mittens.

Chris Vorn, recalled to the stand, declared flatly that the testimony of Ed. Bemis regarding the mittens was several profane kinds of a lie, and there the coroner permitted the question to rest, motioning for Chris to be removed from the room.

When he had disappeared, Conrad Vorn was called.

Once more an ill-restrained rumble and stir of excitement filled the room, and there was a general craning of necks to view the stranger. Conrad was heavier and apparently several years older than his brother, and although in his stoop-shouldered, bony frame and shambling gait there was a family resemblance, he was better groomed and far less uncouth in appearance and manner.

He took the oath with the alacrity of a man anxious to clear himself of suspicion and gazed at the coroner and jury in a wide-eyed assumption of candor.

"You work in the Latimer Airplane Company's factory at Latimer, New Jersey?" the coroner asked. "What is your position?"

"I'm a mechanician; work in the assembling room." He spoke crisply with no trace of the guttural note which characterized his brother's tones. "I got a couple of days off and came out here to see my brother."

"Have you paid him a previous visit lately?"

"No, sir, not in years. Chris and I—well, we ain't been exactly chummy, not since we was boys. Not that there was a word between us!" he added hastily. "But Chris ain't progressive, and he never was what you'd call up and coming. I've been knocking around from one job to another for the last twenty odd years."

"Why did you come to see your brother now?" The coroner leaned forward over the table. "Did he send for you?"

"No, sir. It was what you might call a surprise visit." Conrad Vorn bent nearer also, and although his voice lowered confidentially it carried to every lis-

tening ear. "You see, I ain't been easy in my mind about him for some time past, and I wanted to make sure ever'thing was all right with him on account of the little kid, and all."

"What do you mean?" demanded the coroner. "What could be wrong with him?"

The witness tapped his forehead significantly.

"Chris ain't never been real bright." His gaunt, seamed face flushed darkly. "I'm his brother and it's rotten, I know, to seem to be knocking him like this, but I guess you and all the neighbors know how queer he's been acting, especially since his trouble came and his wife ran away from him. There wasn't anything wrong with him before that; he was just kind of stupid; but since then he's been brooding, and I was afraid from his letters he was getting a little—well, touched. I worried about it, him and the kid here all alone, and at last I made up my mind I'd run out and see how they was getting along."

"You knew that Mr. Latimer, the head of the company which employed you, lived here?"

Conrad Vorn met the coroner's keen gaze frankly with a quick nod.

"Sure I did, but I never gave it a thought until yesterday afternoon when Chris came bursting in the house with the story that a man had come from the sheriff with the news that Mr. Latimer had been killed. I began worrying about my job then and wanted to get on back to Jersey, but Chris wouldn't hear of it."

"Why?"

"The sheriff's man had rattled him and he was scared stiff for fear one or the other of us would be suspected

of knowing something about the murder, on account of me working for Mr. Latimer and him being sore about the short cut being closed. That was all rot, of course, and nobody had a better reason for knowing it and being able to prove it than I had, but he was so upset I thought I had better humor him for awhile, anyway." Conrad Vorn paused, and then straightening and gripping the arms of his chair he added deliberately: "I'm glad I did, sir! If either of us was going to be framed, I'm glad they tried it on me instead of on him, for I'm better able to take care of myself."

"No one has attempted to frame either of you, as you call it!" the coroner's tone thundered. "You are making a graver charge than you realize, Vorn. At what time did you arrive on your surprise visit to see if your brother was in his right mind?"

There was a broad note of sarcasm in his tones intended patently to counteract in the minds of the jury the dramatic impression created by the outburst of the witness. That it did not wholly fail was evident in the sheepish smile which appeared here and there on the faces of the more alert members of that body. Vorn grasped its import also, and he flushed darkly once more.

"I got here at four o'clock on Tuesday afternoon." His sudden truculence betrayed that the mask of candor had fallen, and he was plainly on the defensive. "I worked in the factory till noon and then got two full days' leave from the foreman; you can telegraph to him and find out if I ain't telling the truth. I went around by the road from the station to my brother's

house because I didn't know anything about the short cut. I told you I haven't been here or seen Chris in years.

"When I got to the farm I found the little girl alone, and she said my brother had gone to the village for supplies. He came in just before supper and a few minutes' talk with him showed that I'd been worrying for nothing; he was a little queer, maybe, from being alone so much, but he ain't actually crazy by a long shot, and I'd like to see anybody try to prove it!"

"You are the only one who has even suggested it, Vorn," the coroner reminded him. "You said that you had a better reason for knowing and being able to prove that neither you nor your brother had anything to do with the murder of Mr. Latimer than anyone else. That is the subject of this inquiry, and I ask you now what your reason is, and where is your proof?"

"Because when my brother got back from the village at supper time on Tuesday, Latimer was alive and well; you've got plenty of witnesses to prove that. From then until half an hour on the next afternoon when Chris was in the yard tending to his ducks and that smart Aleck from the sheriff's office came, which was long after Latimer had been found dead and frozen stiff from all accounts, my brother and I was never out of sight of one another, not for a minute, and we wasn't even out of his house! That's my reason, Mr. Coroner, and that's my proof."

He sat back self-confidently with a calculating eye upon the jury, and the coroner remarked in shrewd haste:

"Your testimony as a stranger among us, unveri-

fied, except as it may be by that of a man about whose sanity you admit having doubts, isn't proof on the face of it, Conrad Vorn. Go on with your story. What excuse did you give your brother for your visit?"

"There ain't any necessary when a fellow comes to see the only relations he has in the world, is there?" Vorn leered.

"Was Mr. Latimer's name mentioned between you on Tuesday night?"

"No, I don't remember that it was—sir." The last word was added grudgingly, as though the witness sensed the veering attitude of the jury. After all, he was a stranger, and the coroner was to them also a physician who had proved his friendship in time of direst need and never pressed them for payment. Vorn braced himself once more doggedly in his chair.

"When your brother first returned after you arrival, did you notice whether or not he was wearing mittens?"

For the merest fraction of time the witness hesitated and then replied firmly:

"No, sir. I didn't."

"Why did you think that your brother would be accused of killing Mr. Latimer?" The coroner's quiet tones cut the tensity of the room like a knife-thrust.

"Ain't I been telling you, sir?" Vorn spoke now with patient reproach. "Chris had told me the neighbors was looking cross-eyed at him for keeping by himself and that everybody knew he was sore about the short cut being closed. That fellow making all that fuss about the mitten showed what a fix the sheriff was in to find somebody to blame for the murder,

and it looked to me like they'd try to make a goat of a poor man who hadn't any friends to speak for him. I'm no fool, and I knew what kind of a case could be made out against Chris if I hadn't been here to prove that he hadn't even been near Latimer."

"Yet last night you were anxious to leave?"

"On account of my job; I was due back at noon to-day. Besides, I'd had time to figure that the sheriff here wasn't fool enough after all to try to make Chris the goat." Vorn chuckled sneeringly. "I never thought that city fellow would try to hang it on me, or pull the raw stuff he did!"

The sheriff glanced somewhat uneasily at the coroner. He realized the shrewd cunning of Conrad Vorn in emphasizing to the jury that Odell, too, was a stranger among them. He saw clearly what the man intended to claim and knew the value of first impressions. Upon Doc Hale's personality alone depended the value of the circumstantial evidence presented by the finding of that blue-covered document.

"You admit that your brother was afraid to have you seen leaving the house, was afraid to have your very presence there known because you worked for Mr. Latimer. If he had no more reason for those fears than you claim, do you still pretend to think that he is sane and accountable for his actions?" The coroner spoke still quietly, but he drove each point home with telling effect.

"I don't pretend, I know it!" Vorn retorted harshly. "After supper last night Chris and I played cards with the kid till she went to bed, and then we sat and talked. I got to thinking about getting the last train so's I

could be out to my boarding place this morning and ready to go on with the noon shift today, and Chris and I were arguing—”

“You weren’t fighting, struggling?” The coroner interrupted sternly.

“No, sir!” Vorn’s eyes flashed. “We was just talking when that sheriff’s guy comes through the window, frame and all, and jumped me!”

“Why didn’t you go to your brother’s help and put out this man whom you claimed had attacked you both without cause?” demanded the coroner, and one or two of the jurors nodded emphatically.

A slow and wary smile twisted the thin lips of the witness.

“Because I recognized this bird—excuse me, sir, I should say the city fellow the sheriff had called in—from what my brother had told me about him in the afternoon, and it was up to me to spot this guy’s game if I could. I made up my mind I’d let him go as far as he liked and then tell the truth about it afterwards. I ain’t afraid to face any fair-minded, honest men in this world!”

He gazed triumphantly at the jury; but the canny skepticism he read in the double row of faces showed him that he had failed to score with his argument, and he went on hurriedly:

“The fellow came over to where I was lying, and on the way he picked something up from the table. When he got over to me I saw that it was some safety pins of the kid’s. Then he pulled out of his pocket a long, thick, folded paper, light blue or gray, and stuck it up under my vest and pinned it there with the pins,

watching me all the time to see if I'd woke up and was onto him.—I'm telling the truth, so help me!"

He added the last as an ominous murmur rose from those in the back of the room and one of the jurors leaped excitedly to his feet.

"Sit down!" commanded the coroner, and no one present had ever heard quite that quality in those usually patient, fatherly tones before. "Silence there!—Go on, Vorn!"

For once the witness' bravado appeared to fail him, and beads of perspiration started visibly on his lined forehead; but he wiped them away with a defiant gesture and continued doggedly:

"I didn't know what that paper was, I don't know now, but I did think it had something to do with Latimer, and I supposed the fellow was going to leave it there and tie me up like Chris, so it would be found on me. Right away, though, he unpinning it and looked at it real careful before he put it back in his pocket and it came over me all of a sudden how slick he was and what he'd done that for! It was so there'd be pin holes in that paper and pin holes in my vest that would match, and he could pretend that he had taken it away from me!"

He sprang to his feet and flinging his coat over the back of his chair tore off his waistcoat and held it out. At a sign from the coroner the constable took it and brought it forward. Producing the crumpled document, the coroner gravely compared the perforations in it with those in the worn garment and then gestured to have the two exhibits passed on to the jury.

"Gentlemen," he said solemnly, "the subject matter of the paper does not matter at this time. I will ask you to examine carefully the holes in it and in the vest to which the witness has alluded and to bear them in mind, for later I shall submit evidence to you of another sort concerning them.—Proceed, Vorn. You still made no attempt to act?"

The contemptuous incredulity in the coroner's tones stung Vorn, and he retorted:

"Yes, I did! I got mad then,—any man would have at such a mean trick,—and I forgot I was trying to beat him at his own game! I fought him, but I'm a peaceable workingman, I ain't a trained scrapper like the city police! When the fellow began at me I told him the truth about who I was and where I worked and no more; if he says I did, it's a lie! When he found he couldn't get anything out of me that he could twist around to hurt either of us, he went off and got a couple more deputies and had me hauled off to the jail and then brought here this morning. I ain't seen Chris or the kid since, and that's all I've got to say, sir. It's the truth, and I leave it to you and the jury if a frame-up has been tried on me or not!"

He held out his hand expectantly for his waistcoat, but the coroner shook his head.

"I guess we'll keep that vest of yours as evidence for awhile anyway, Vorn. How long have you worked at the Latimer Airplane Factory in New Jersey?"

"For nearly two years, sir; since April, nineteen-eighteen." He shrugged and resuming his coat buttoned it and sat back in his chair.

"Did you know Mr. Latimer?"

"By sight, yes."

"Did you ever hear of Sun Hsu?"

The mildly grave, gentle tones of the coroner struck upon the witness with a curious effect. He blinked, and for an instant his jaw hung limply while his hands worked nervously.

"Heard of *what*, sir?" he said at length.

"A person named Sun Hsu; a man who once had a paper like this one which you claim was pinned under your vest," the coroner explained.

"I don't think so, sir; I don't recollect the name." Vorn shook his head, adding: "I don't know anything more about any paper than I have told you."

"All right. Did you ever see this before?" The coroner held up the electric torch. "The initials C. V. are scratched on it. Constable, let the witness examine it and then pass it on to the gentlemen of the jury."

Vorn's lip curled.

"I've seen a hundred like this!" he declared. "It don't belong to me."

"Very good." The coroner, too, sat back in his chair. "You're excused, Conrad Vorn."

The witness gave an involuntary start of surprise and then with a smile of conscious triumph turned to the door; but the smile faded when the sheriff laid a hand upon his arm and motioned to two of the deputies who were waiting in the hallway.

"Look here, you can't hold me!" he blustered. "The coroner let me go, and you've got nothing—!"

His protests died away and were abruptly shut off by the thud of a closing door.

The coroner then convened the inquest to the scene

of the murder itself, and in the falling dusk described to the jury the circumstances of the finding of the body, and later the bag and the anchor. When they returned to the house, the jurors were locked in the dining-room to deliberate, and Odell and the sheriff met in a small smoking-room.

"Where in time did you go to right after Chris's brother accused you of framing him? I had three deputies looking for you!"

"I was on hand when the coroner wanted me again, wasn't I?" laughed Odell. "I admit that accusation was a surprise, but it only goes to show that Conrad Vorn is going to give us good hunting. He's alert and plausible and bold and as clever as they come; I'm going to enjoy this, John."

"I'm glad somebody is!" grumbled Pettingill. "To my way of thinking, Doc Hale hashed up this inquest and that dumb jury may have clean lost sight of the two main clues."

"What are they?" Odell was still smiling.

"Why, the torn fur coat and the telephone call that Mrs. Latimer couldn't be found to answer," the sheriff responded. "That set of plans or whatever they are that you found on Conrad Vorn may have been stolen from the house here or from the factory, but in spite of what you heard those two brothers talking about through the window I don't believe that either of them killed Gilbert Latimer!"

"Neither do I," agreed Odell unexpectedly.

Pettingill stared.

"Coming around to my idea at last?" he exclaimed. "Beginning to see that Mrs. Latimer—?"

He got no farther, for a rush of feet in the hall outside and a subdued but rising clamor drew them both irresistibly out to learn that the verdict had been reached. Gilbert Latimer had come to his death by the hand of a person or persons unknown.

CHAPTER XII.

ODELL'S LONE HAND

“WELL, John, it appears to be up to you, now.” Dr. Hale settled back comfortably and drew upon his pipe. “I did my part, and like most juries at an inquest, mine—er, passed the buck this afternoon. What are you going to do about it?”

It was Thursday evening, and again the coroner, the sheriff and Barry Odell were gathered in the doctor's study in an unofficial discussion of the Latimer Case, as the murder had already come to be known throughout the countryside and in the sensational metropolitan dailies.

“I'm going to find out who killed Gilbert Latimer, just as I told you I would!” John Pettingill retorted. “I've had the two Vorns held in the county jail on suspicion, but I'm not going to get side-tracked from my original opinions! Even Barry don't think either of them did it; he admitted as much to me today.”

Dr. Hale glanced at Odell, who nodded.

“When the sheriff invited me to sit in this game, Doctor, he told me that I might play a lone hand if I wanted to, you know, and I've taken him at his word. I have my own theory of the case now, but I must confess it is a negative one. There are several people that I think did *not* commit the crime, but I haven't an idea of the actual identity of the one who did,

though I have indications which I hope may lead to the truth."

"But you heard Conrad Vorn say there was danger in his being found in his brother's house!" Dr. Hale expostulated. "You heard him say he'd got what he came to Sunnymeade for, and you found that set of plans and specifications on him which Crewe claims Latimer had when he left the city for home on the day of his death and which could not have legitimately come into Conrad's possession!"

"Granted. I also told John this morning that I thought we had the man who wielded the anchor, and I still think so; but none of these clues point conclusively in my mind to the person who necessarily killed Latimer," Odell responded. "There's a contingency which both of you gentlemen have overlooked and which would seem so remote and improbable to you now that I won't go into it; but I do most strongly advise that the two Vorns be held in custody or at least under surveillance, for I think they will be wanted on a criminal charge, anyway."

"They'll have to come up before the magistrate in a day or two and be discharged if I don't get anything definite to hold them on," announced the sheriff gloomily. "I'll have a couple of deputies trail them after that as long as they stay in the county, but that's all I can do."

"All!" repeated Dr. Hale. "I'm not trying to interfere with you in the performance of your official duty, John, but I should think the sergeant's testimony and Crewe's identification of the plans would be enough

to have them both held for the grand jury on a charge of murder."

"Not if I get a warrant for somebody else and have them held on the same charge!" the sheriff declared. "If I get no further evidence against the Vorns and that Conrad sticks to his lie about a frame-up, the case wouldn't hold water and you know it. Barry himself can't even suggest who the murderer is, but I can, and I'm not going to let hysterical sentiment stand in my way, as I told you before. The folks of this county who put me in office don't expect chivalry from me; they expect results, and they're going to get 'em! There's nothing 'remote' about the evidence of that fur coat, nor 'improbable' about a love affair that's as plain as the nose on your face, and I'm going to work along those lines, watch Willow Brook, and dig up what I can about Mrs. Latimer and Starr Agnew. You've known me since we were both boys, Doc, and you know I'm not looking for notoriety at the expense of any innocent person, especially a woman; but neither am I going to dodge my plain duty. If I get enough circumstantial evidence to strengthen the case with the only real clues I've got now, just as soon as the Vorns are let off I'll get a warrant for Mrs. Latimer. I'm telling both of you this in confidence.

"I think you'll be making a big mistake, John," Dr. Hale remarked gravely.

Odell sat lost in thought for a minute and then looked at the sheriff.

"You're not taking into consideration, then, the man with whom Latimer talked at the station, the last

person with whom he was seen alive?" he asked. "If Mrs. Latimer is ever brought to trial the defense will play that up big, you know."

"I'm scouring the country for him, Barry, and I'm going to keep on," replied the sheriff. "He wasn't seen after the eight-fifty pulled out for the city, though, and if he didn't go on her in spite of what the conductor said, I'm inclined to think you were right."

"I?"

"Yes. If you remember, when we were talking about it and about Hiram Claggett saying the fellow was a stranger, you said it didn't necessarily follow that he was because Hiram couldn't identify him; that if he really was, the fact might have aroused Hiram's curiosity so that he would have noticed him more particularly and been able to describe him. If there was something vaguely familiar about him, like there might be about anyone who lived around here but who Hiram didn't know well, he might just have glanced at him and forgot about him. At least, that's what I gathered you meant, and I've been thinking it over; I shouldn't wonder but you hit the nail on the head."

"Hasn't it occurred to you, then, that someone else beside poor, stupid Chris Vorn who lives around here might have a grudge against Latimer?" Odell asked. "Possibly the man who was talking to him, for instance?"

"There's something in that," Dr. Hale urged. "Don't go off half cocked at the first apparent clue that comes your way, John. As far as you've told us you haven't even a scrap of circumstantial evidence that Mrs. Latimer and this Mr. Agnew are in love with each other

except your hastily formed personal opinion, and that's the only possible motive you've advanced for Latimer having been put out of the way. That piece of fur torn from the coat merely proves that someone wore it lately near the scene of the crime. If such a love affair did exist, you said last night that Agnew would have had as urgent a reason for committing the murder as the man's own wife, and you were having Agnew's movements on the night of the crime looked up. I take it that you haven't had much success along that line?"

The sheriff bit savagely into his unlighted cigar, and his lean face flushed.

"You're right, I didn't," he admitted honestly. "Starr Agnew was in his club, the Commonwealth, from four until nearly five o'clock on Tuesday afternoon. He left there in his own car, a fast roadster with a mighty silent engine, and the authorities in town can't get any trace of him after that until he drove into his garage at midnight. Seven hours or more out in the bitter cold in an open car! It don't sound reasonable to me. He'll run out to Willow Brook again tomorrow,—his sister is still staying on with Mrs. Latimer,—and I'm going up myself and have a talk with him. I didn't think it was good policy to try it today even if I had had a chance."

"You won't find it easy to get any incriminating statement from him, supposing that such evidence might exist," Dr. Hale said reflectively. "As the family friend, of course, he'll be hand in glove with Lef-ferts and Crewe, Mrs. Latimer's attorneys, and they'll coach him if necessary. In introducing that torn mole-

skin coat as evidence at the inquest today it goes without saying that we have shown them which way the wind may possibly blow."

"That's all right!" the sheriff retorted tenaciously. "I only want to know where Starr Agnew went in his car on Tuesday evening, and if he won't tell a straight story it will be because he can't. I suppose you realize that he would have had time to motor out here, talk with Latimer at the station, follow him out to the pond at Willow Brook and still get back to his garage at midnight?"

"A man doesn't usually motor through the country in the dead of winter in an ordinary dark overcoat and derby hat, John, but have it your own way," the doctor observed good-naturedly. "As for me, I'm off on my old round tomorrow; this sudden thaw is the sort of weather to fatten the churchyards if we medicos don't watch out. By the way, the Latimer funeral has been set for Saturday morning, I hear."

"Yes, so Crewe told me." Pettingill nodded. "Naturally it is going to be private, and they want to keep the time a secret because of the notoriety. They've got an undertaker and minister from the city, and the body is to be removed immediately and interred in Greenlawn; the whole thing will be over before nine o'clock in the morning, but I'll be there."

"Will you, Sergeant?" Dr. Hale turned to Odell once more.

"Not I!" The latter shook his head. "I could not attend in an official capacity, you know, and I doubt if I would learn anything that would help along the line of investigation I have butted into. I'm off to the

city tomorrow, and the Lord knows where after that until my own sick leave expires; the problem that involved Latimer ended for him by the pond at Willow Brook, but I have an idea that it began far afield. John, you've no objection to my interviewing the people up there or anyone connected with them at any time as long as I don't do anything to give away your hand, have you?"

The sheriff smiled.

"I can trust you not to do that," he replied heartily. "I'm mighty glad of your help even if your theory don't agree with mine, and if you can prove that I'm on the wrong track no one will be more glad than I. You needn't think, either of you, that I'm stuck on the course I've mapped out for myself; it's a rotten business, but I only want to see justice done."

The next morning broke clear and still warmer so that the whole countryside was a veritable sea of slush. Odell breakfasted early and taking an indefinite leave of his host and hostess made his way to the station.

Only four other men boarded the eight-ten train, and although they all entered the smoking car Odell observed as he followed them that three of them greeted each other with the easy camaraderie of intimate daily association, while the fourth, though cordial enough, held himself somewhat aloof.

Turning the back of one seat over so that it faced another, the three arranged themselves comfortably together, while the fourth took a place by a window a short distance away and opened a newspaper. Odell seated himself across the aisle back of them, and

while ostensibly eying the dreary, grayish-white landscape which scudded past, listened to the desultory talk going on about him.

Of the three men who sat together, one was fat and red-headed with a brisk, hustling air, and the rest addressed him as "Jim." The second was of middle age with one angular shoulder held habitually higher than the other and the deprecating manner of the typical office clerk. The last was small and wiry, with a grizzled stubble of beard outstanding upon his chin, and he spoke in a loud, nasal, self-assertive tone.

The state of the weather had been exhausted as a topic of anathema, and it was natural enough that the next subject of conversation should be the murder which was the sensation of the day.

"Wonder when they'll bury Latimer?" The loud-voiced man spoke above the rumble of the train. "Like enough they'll sneak the body away today sometime, to get rid of that raft of reporters who've been hanging around. Were you at the inquest yesterday, Howard?"

The middle-aged man coughed deprecatingly.

"I couldn't get in, there was such a crowd. Who do you suppose killed him, anyway?"

"I hope they find out before the bungalow season opens!" the stout, red-haired man declared. "It'll sure put a crimp in the renting business this summer if they don't!"

"You needn't worry, Jim," the first speaker remarked. "Chris Vorn has been jailed for it already and the grand jury sits next month; the whole thing'll be over before summer. It's a lucky thing after all that

I didn't nail Latimer for life insurance! I called on him when they first moved out to get him and maybe his wife to take out a policy, but he told me he was carrying all the insurance he wanted to; he was the toughest prospect I ever tried to handle, and he acted like he owned the earth. He didn't make himself any too popular to start off with, closing up the thoroughfare through the south pasture and all!"

Jim chuckled.

"He made himself popular with me by doing it, all right!" he exclaimed. "The county will have to get after that back road now and improve it, and I've got two sections of building lots on it that haven't been worth the taxes on them!"

"I can hardly believe Chris did it," ventured Howard. "Never heard of that brother of his before, and that story about being framed-up couldn't have been true; we all know John Pettingill, and there hasn't ever been a straighter sheriff in office. Chris isn't neighborly, but he has had a lot of trouble and that soured him; he wouldn't hurt a cat. What makes you think he did it, Blair? I don't believe they'll ever get a jury in this county to convict him."

The self-assertive little man smiled knowingly.

"I didn't say I thought Chris was guilty!" he disclaimed. "Of course, his brother lied, but we don't know what the sheriff has got up his sleeve. Maybe he's just trying to gain time. I've got my own ideas about this case, but I guess I won't do much talking; not just yet."

His tone was that of one inviting inquiry, and Odell heard a quick rustle of paper as the train slowed at

a way station. He glanced across the aisle at the fourth man who had boarded the car at Sunnymead and saw that although he had turned a page of his newspaper he was not reading, and there was a keen, introspective look upon his lean, tanned face as though he were listening intently.

Observing him more closely, Odell noted that although there were deeply drawn lines about his gray eyes, his alert, well-poised figure was that of a man in the early thirties. His nostrils and smooth-shaven lips were thin, but the chin above the upturned collar of his overcoat was full, and the fingers of the ungloved hand holding the newspaper up before him were long and tapering, while the thumb was thick, fleshy and spatulate. The detective was speculating idly on the contradictory indications of the artistic and practical, ascetic and sensual, when he became conscious of a vague sense of familiarity. He could not recall ever having spoken to the man, yet possibly he had encountered him in the village during his stay, or had seen him among the crowd at the inquest the previous day.

No newcomers entered the car, and as it pulled out once more the red-haired man called Jim exclaimed:

"Forgot my matches again! Got any, Blair?"

The little man searched his pockets fussily and shook his head, and Howard remarked:

"I've kind of given up smoking since the boss made everybody cut it out at the office, and my wife don't like it smelling up the house in winter."

On a suddenly-formed decision Odell drew a match-

box from his pocket and crossing the aisle offered it to the red-haired man.

"Excuse me; have a light?" He added easily: "Couldn't help hearing you ask for one, sir; I forgot to get a paper at the station at Sunnymeade, and I've got nothing to do but twiddle my thumbs and look out of the window till we get to the city! Does this rattler stop at every telegraph pole on the way in?"

"Thanks." Jim accepted the match and looked up with a brisk eye to business. "You ought to have taken the commuters' special, next train to this, a fine one. You a stranger in Sunnymeade? Been looking our little town over? It's growing faster than any in this section of the country; got great business and residential possibilities—"

"You're the sheriff's man, ain't you?" Blair interrupted accusingly. "Heard you testify at the inquest yesterday!"

Odell smiled with the boyish candor which had won him many a reluctant confidence and replied:

"I'm an old friend of John Pettingill; been visiting him while I got over the effects of a scrap in New York. I'm on the police force there, and John asked me to help him get the dope on this Latimer murder for him, but it was almost too easy!"

The man called Howard moved over to widen the empty fourth seat.

"Sit down," he invited. "I couldn't get in at the inquest. So the case is settled, is it?"

Odell laughed.

"Guess so!" he remarked with careless assurance. "Must have been that crazy Dutchman that owns the

duck farm. I'd like to have seen the business through, but the captain of my bureau sent a hurry call for me and I've got to hike it out West after a gunman; that's more in my line, anyway."

He accepted the vacant seat and after a prolonged scrutiny of his apparently guileless countenance Blair settled back as though satisfied. The expressions of the other two of the original trio showed plainly that they, too, had taken the city detective for the cocksure, dull-witted routine man he pretended to be.

"Still, I've been telling my friends here that I'm not so sure about Chris Vorn being guilty." Blair rose aggressively to the bait. "Latimer was a stranger among us, and although he paid his local bills promptly and was accounted a rich man nobody really knew anything about him. How can we judge what enemies he may have had? It's kind of lonely by Willow Brook, especially in winter, with plenty of roads leading past, and anybody could have got out there afoot or in a machine at that time of night without being noticed particularly. What gets me is how Latimer happened to be by that pond when he was supposed to be on his way to the city."

To give the others time and opportunity in which to express a possible opinion, Odell produced a box of cigarettes and selecting one leaned out in the aisle to light it, at the same time stealing a quick glance at the fourth man; but he had seemingly resumed his perusal of the paper and his attitude suggested utter lack of extraneous interest.

"I guess we can leave it to the sheriff and the district attorney," Jim said comfortably. "If Latimer

had any enemies, and anybody else but Vorn was guilty of the murder, I believe they'll ferret out the truth."

"I think they'd ought to have taken more thought to the last man Latimer was seen talking to, the one at the station," the office clerk, Howard, observed in a mild tone. "Whoever he was, he might have had reason to know that Latimer would take that eighty-five back into town that night and waited around to see him. Hiram Claggett as much as said he must have been hiding behind the baggage truck; that no one was in sight at the station at all after Mr. Kingsley and Mr. Farwell there arrived from town on the eight-twenty and went on home."

As he mentioned the latter name he gestured with a thumb toward the man with the newspaper, who gave no sign of having heard, and Blair asserted confidently:

"Well, I reckon we haven't seen the end of the excitement, even if Vorn and his brother are in jail. I told you I had my own idea, but I wasn't talking yet. You wait and see!—There, we're getting in, and four minutes late! That's better than usual!"

Casual farewells were said, and as the train pulled into the huge station Odell marched briskly off by himself, careful to seem bent strictly upon his own affairs. He ascended to the vast waiting-room without a glance behind at his late fellow travelers and traversing it was mounting the second pair of wide, shallow stairs to the street level when a hand fell lightly upon his arm and a pleasant, cultivated, youthful voice sounded in his ear.

“Excuse me, Mr. Odell. I wanted to get a chance to speak to you on the train, but our rural friends monopolized you. If you’re not in an imperative hurry may I walk along with you? I’m a neighbor, and a slight acquaintance of the man whose death you are investigating, and I’m naturally interested. My name is Roscoe Farwell.”

CHAPTER XIII.

BY ORDERS OF THE CHIEF

ODELL smiled, too, and held out his hand. "How are you, Mr. Farwell! I'm on my way to Headquarters to report, but I took an earlier train than necessary because, being a stranger, I hadn't any too much respect for the accuracy of your time-table; so I've a little time to spare. I heard of you from Mr. Claggett, of course, and I believe that one of the men I got into conversation with on the train just now mentioned your name, but I'm afraid you've got me wrong; I never had any official connection with the case. I was only visiting John Pettingill during my leave and trying to help him out, and my time's up."

"And Sergeant Barry Odell, who refused a captaincy after solving the last celebrated murder case New York had merely so that he might work with a freer hand, is going to pass up all interest in an equally celebrated case in what might be termed the suburbs just because his leave has expired?" the other asked with a twinkle in his gray eyes. "That may go with the village wiseacres, and I'm not asking you to tell me anything you don't want to, Sergeant; but I don't mind telling you that this little excitement is a god-send to a man of different caliber and experience.— You've had your breakfast, of course, but I know what Ma Pettingill's coffee is! Have you time to come and

have a second cup with me in a little place near here that's been famous for more generations than you or I will ever see?"

Odell assented, and when they were seated in the celebrated, oak-beamed tavern with steaming cups and crisp rolls before them, he eyed his host in quick, covert appraisal. That this interview had been sought with some definite purpose in view was patent. It could not have been from mere idle curiosity. Who was this man Farwell? Even as he cogitated, the latter answered the unspoken question.

"I suppose you'll wonder what I'm doing in a God-forsaken hole like Sunnymead, among natives who are admittedly not my sort," he began frankly. "See those fine lines about my chin and down the side of my jaw? They are practically the only indications left of the old face I had in nineteen-seventeen. Wonderful chaps, the British surgeons are! I was in the camouflage corps, and a gun on which I was working exploded. That's the answer. When I got to looking at somebody else in my shaving mirror I went back to my old trade, painting, and picked out Sunnymead; you'd be surprised what possibilities its shore line and stretches of rolling hills have to an artist's eye!"

"It's a pretty place, all right, or all that rich crowd wouldn't have built summer homes there and a country club." Odell kept carefully in character. "Don't your family find it lonesome in winter with nobody but the townspeople, though, if they're used to the New York Bohemian bunch?"

"I haven't anybody but my sister, and she's a globe-trotter with money enough of her own to gratify her

taste for travel and old enough to do without the conventional chaperone bugbear!" Farwell laughed again. "I'm a grouch, I suppose; haven't much use for anything except my work. But this Latimer business interests me, and I knew that duck farmer and his brother were only in jail as a sort of blind when the other evidence was so much stronger."

"What other evidence?" demanded Odell.

"Oh, that torn coat and the piece from it which you found hanging in the holly bushes, to say nothing of that 'phone call that couldn't be answered. Then there's that man at the station that nobody appears to have seen but the baggage master, and Latimer's unexpected return to his home immediately after." Farwell shrugged. "To my knowledge, I never saw Mrs. Latimer in my life except passing occasionally in her car—I live in that little concrete bungalow just down the road from their big place—and my acquaintance with Latimer himself was just a casual one, so I'm not prejudiced in any way; but I frankly admit I'm curious."

"So am I," Odell responded frankly as he drained his cup. "The sheriff's in charge of the case, of course, and it is in his jurisdiction, not that of the metropolitan police; so I haven't the right even to discuss it. But, unofficially, there are several odd features about it. You are right that I'd like to have a further hand in it, but I'm all bound with red tape. Of course, I don't say that I don't agree with John Pettingill as to who really killed Latimer, but it's no crime to admit that the points you mention would bear investigation. The only concrete bungalow I recall in the neighbor-

hood is the one just across from Mrs. Vail's, whose kid Jimmie discovered the body."

Farwell nodded.

"That's where I live."

"Then it's on the straight road from the station to Willow Brook. You got back from town that night on the same train with a man named Kingsley, didn't you?"

"Yes. He's the naturalist and has done some pretty work in grafting; the real thing, you know, fruit trees and flowers." Farwell laughed again with a boyish flash of his white teeth. "He's rather noted in his line, but a prosy old chap, and I read most of the way from town. Lord, but it was cold! I hurried home from the station and in spite of the bad going I must have done my mile and a half in pretty good time, for I was well toward home when Latimer passed me in his little car."

"Did he see you?" asked Odell.

"Guess not; he didn't bow, anyway, and it was pretty dark just there. Have a cigarette?" Farwell offered a plain silver case, and his companion accepted one of the slender, imported Xerxes with which it was half filled. "Mrs. Vail comes over to 'do for me,' as she expresses it, by the day, but she'd left my lights turned off and my furnace was low. I had a devil of a time getting it going again and starting the hearth fire in my studio; I guess that's why I didn't hear Latimer's car return, or notice that anyone passed that evening."

"I see." Odell flicked the pale ash into his coffee cup. "But you said you wanted to speak to me; got any theory to spring, Mr. Farwell? You know about

the Vorns having that document that Latimer was supposed to have brought out from town with him that afternoon, but Conrad might have worked it through Chris to get in cahoots with one of the Latimer servants to let one or both of them in the house to steal it; or it may have been a case of plain burglary, they knowing nothing of what went on down by the pond. We run up against just such coincidences here in cases every day. I might put a flea in the sheriff's ear without committing official trespass!"

"Well, Sergeant, I won't go so far as to say I have a theory, exactly, but when I heard the particulars of the murder I asked myself why Latimer didn't go home if he had intended to do so; why he turned off down to the pond, I mean. I wondered if he had a private appointment of some sort, or caught sight from the driveway of something down there that ought to be investigated. Then, when it came out at the inquest yesterday about a piece of Mrs. Latimer's fur coat having been found torn off and hanging on a bush at the scene of the crime, and the butler's testimony which amounted virtually to the fact that she was not in her room or anywhere in the house where he searched around nine o'clock or after, I began asking myself another question."

"Exactly." Odell nodded in eager acquiescence as though the other's train of thought were in accord with his own. "What question, Mr. Farwell?"

"Whether that suppositious appointment might not have been made between two other people, and Mr. Latimer, apprised of it at the station, might not have returned either prematurely or in time to make a very

bad third." Farwell chose his words with evident care. "Remember, Sergeant, this is not even a theory but the mere idle thought of a curious neighbor who has nothing better to do than paint indifferent daubs of snow scenes and wait until the spring opens up to give him fresh inspiration for his canvases."

Odell rose, still holding his half smoked cigarette.

"I must get on down to Headquarters, but I'm mighty glad to have had this little talk with you. Of course, we deal only with facts, and I've nothing to do with the Latimer case anyway; but the ideas of anybody that's different from that hayseed bunch down there are good to hear, Mr. Farwell. If I get a chance and the trial ever comes off I may run down to Sunnymead before the finish."

"If you do, run in and see me!" Farwell invited cordially as they shook hands. "I've followed some of your big cases with interest, and I'd like nothing better than to hear how you pulled them off."

Odell crossed rapidly to Broadway and down to Headquarters, going over in retrospection each word of the late interview. Had Farwell tried to tip him off about something without himself being dragged into the notoriety of the case as a witness? He seemed a decent enough fellow, and it was a dirty mess to accuse a woman of murder, especially such a woman as Mrs. Latimer. Still, could the sheriff be right, after all? Was he, Odell, still laboring against his better judgment?

Hurrying up the steps at Headquarters, Odell strode down the wide corridor to the homicide bureau at the farther end and met a rapid fire of greeting from the

various desks behind the rail. When he had replied in kind a stockily built young man approached and observed confidentially:

"The chief wants to see you, Barry."

"Me!" exclaimed Odell indignantly. "And my leave not expired for four days yet!"

"A fine use you've made of it, from this morning's papers!" the other retorted with a grin. "Is it your idea of a rest to go get yourself mixed up in a new murder case, with Killer Jordan's bullet only just pried out of you? What's that bulging the side of your coat?"

"A little souvenir I brought from the country." Odell grinned in response and then his face grew grave. "You are not kidding about the chief? How did he know—?"

"Oh, I rather guess he suspected you'd be hanging around this morning," the other interrupted. "Anyway, that's the word that has been passed, and it's no kid, either."

Slightly dazed, Odell made his way to the office of the captain and was not at first enlightened by his reception.

"Like Sunnymeade, Sergeant?" the chief asked when the more formal greetings had been exchanged. "As a winter resort it seems to have done you a great deal of good; so much, in fact, that I think you had better return on an extended leave."

"What's the idea sir?" Odell shifted from one foot to the other. "If you refer to the Latimer case, I was an involuntary witness at the inquest as a private individual. I've been visiting the sheriff of North-

Shore County: he and his family are friends of mine, and I've still four days of my leave—"

"I know all that!" the chief interrupted grimly. "It was as a private individual and his guest, I suppose, that the sheriff swore you in as his deputy and you pulled off that stunt at the duck farm? I'm not calling you down for that, Sergeant; on the contrary, I'm offering you a month's extended leave of absence and suggesting that you spend it at Sunnymead."

"I don't understand, sir," Odell remarked, but a gleam of comprehension had come to him. "Is somebody after cooperation in an unofficial capacity?"

"You've hit it!" the chief assented. "In plain words, the district attorney down there is yelling for help. Your friend the sheriff and the constable are both good men, as I understand it, with an inflated opinion of their own jobs and a desire to keep in with their constituents. Well, we've seen that sort of thing right here in our own town, eh, Sergeant? This case seems to be a little too big for them to handle, and the D. A. doesn't want to make a charge, when this present move of theirs has failed as it's bound to do, and go to trial with insufficient evidence so that this case will be just another fiasco."

Odell shook his head obstinately.

"Please send another man down instead, sir," he said. "The magistrate won't hold the Vorns, and it was to ask you to send one or two of the boys down there, unofficially, to trail those two brothers till I could clear up the matter of their connection with the case that I dropped in today. As a matter of fact, I don't think they've anything to do with the actual

murder, but I think I do know what the sheriff as well as the district attorney have in mind, and—I'd rather somebody else helped it along. But I'd be grateful for that month's leave of absence, just the same."

"What's the matter?" asked the chief coldly. "I never knew you to lay down on a job before, Sergeant."

"No, sir, and you never knew me to play politics and disgrace my stripes!" Odell retorted with vigor. "The sheriff's honest, but he's bull-headed, and he thinks a certain party is guilty; he is going to disregard every other clue to prove that he's right. If he can, and the district attorney can get a conviction, it will mean a walk-over for them both at the next election. This Latimer case is make or break with them and they know it. I'd not quarrel with that if the party they have in mind were guilty, but I'll help to send no innocent person to the chair, maybe, while the one who killed Latimer goes free!"

The chief sat back in his chair toying with a pencil, and there was a peculiar expression upon his face.

"Then you don't think Mrs. Latimer killed her husband?" he asked at length.

"The present evidence doesn't prove it, sir," responded Odell.

"I never knew you to take a case yet, even in your early days, that you didn't see through to a finish, Sergeant." The chief looked up and there was an unmistakable twinkle in his eyes. "Why did you want that month's extended leave of absence?"

"To find out who killed Latimer, sir," Odell added hurriedly. "I know it is irregular, but I would act

only in a strictly private capacity, in no one's pay, just for the—the love of the game; and if you will put in an application for my leave I won't abuse your good faith, on my honor!"

To his unbounded amazement his superior suddenly beat upon the desk and howled.

"Odell, you'll be the death of me! You, with your conscientiousness! You won't play any politics! Why man, if you monkey with the Latimer case any further you can't help yourself!" The chief pulled himself together suddenly as though he had said too much, and turning to his young subordinate he added: "The grand jury meets in North Shore County at Sunny-mead in three weeks, on the first of March. You're a special officer from this department, loaned to the district attorney of that county, but with the understanding that you are free to conduct your investigations in any manner that you see fit, with orders from no one and the assurance that every courtesy is to be shown you, such as access to any prisoner who may be held for trial before that body on the charge of murder in connection with the Latimer affair. Does that suit you, Sergeant?"

"It's—it's splendid! It's far more than I expected, sir," the young man stammered. "But in every case you have put in my hands here in the city, your only instructions were to go out after the guilty party and bring them in—"

"And my instructions are the same to you now!" the chief declared. "Go out after the party who killed Latimer, I don't care who it is, and get him!"

"I'll do my best, sir." Odell's eyes shone. "Do I

have to report to the district attorney or the sheriff?"

"That's up to your own discretion. I'll see that two of the boys are on hand when the magistrate discharges the Vorns and tail them until you come."

"Thanks, Chief. I don't think I'll be long clearing up that matter, but the main part of the case may take some time, and I can't tell now just when I'll show up again in Sunnymead. You'll tell the district attorney that I'm on the job?"

"I will, and good luck, Odell!"

"Thanks, sir!"

Odell left the great, echoing building as though he were treading on air and took the nearest route for the Pennsylvania Station. But gradually his elation left him. He was up against it, and no mistake! It was like breaking faith with John Pettingill to work against him when that excellent sheriff himself had been the one to bring him into the case; and if the Vorns were eliminated, how strong the circumstantial evidence seemed against the stand he had taken!

That young artist, Farwell, had stated the case as clearly and concisely as though he had been a lawyer. That was what any well informed, unprejudiced person would think, of course. Odell went over every iota of evidence in his mind, weighing it and striving to regard it as his fellow traveler of the morning had done; when all at once he halted in the middle of a busy street, to the intense indignation of the traffic policeman. Had he by some lucky chance hit upon the truth?

CHAPTER XIV.

TO PROTECT HER

LATIMER, New Jersey, seemed a most unlovely spot as the train approached it after a ride of more than an hour. Its grim smokestacks and acres of brick buildings with their adjacent rows of uniform workmen's cottages appeared even more dreary surrounded by the snowy, flat countryside.

It was nearing noon as Odell alighted at the company platform and made his way to the superintendent's low, square office set well in the center of the modern hive of industry. An inquiry of a man in overalls lounging near the door brought in response a mere gesture toward a heavily built man with graying hair who sat bowed over a desk and who looked up with a scowl as Odell advanced.

"If you're a reporter you can get out!" he growled. "We've no information for you; see the New York office of the company."

"I'm not a reporter." Odell smiled. "I understand you have a mechanic who works in one of your assembling rooms named Conrad Vorn, or at least you had. We've got him in jail now down on Long Island and I want a word with his foreman."

He flashed his shield, and the superintendent rose reluctantly.

"Come on," he said. "Carroll's the man you want.

I'll tell you right now that you fellows have got Vorn wrong; mind you, I'm not sticking up for him, but he's the kind of guy who makes the bullets and lets the other fellow fire them for him. He never killed Mr. Latimer, and all that stuff about a document is either a bluff or a frame-up."

"He's an expert workman in his line, isn't he?" Odell ignored the challenge as he followed his guide down a cinder path between two long factory buildings.

"One of the best, or we would have canned him long ago for shooting his mouth off among the men. He is one of these born agitators, but he's harmless; even the guys he works with don't take him seriously.— Here we are. Oh, Carroll! There's a deputy from Sunnymead who wants a word with you."

The superintendent sauntered away with a nod, and Odell gave no indication that the former's sarcasm had penetrated his consciousness as a brisk, sandy-haired man of middle age came forward.

"Sorry to deprive you of one of your expert workmen, Mr. Carroll." He spoke with more courtesy than he had shown the surly superintendent. "It'll only be for a day or two; that is, if you want him back. The sooner we can check up on some of his statements, though, the quicker we can haul him before the magistrate and have him released."

Carroll unceremoniously took his visitor by the arm and led him out of earshot of the workers within.

"Sure I want him back," he said. "Conrad talks a lot of rot, but he's no shirker and one of the fastest mechanics I've got. I hold the record for results in my department, and I can't afford to lose him. I

can handle these volunteer walking delegates and that's what he is; but, take it from me, he hasn't got the nerve to croak anybody. What's he been saying that you want information about?"

"Well, between you and me, Mr. Carroll, his brother, who runs a duck farm at Sunnymead, isn't just right in the head. Everybody knows it, and he's one of the characters of the countryside. We've come to the conclusion that this Conrad is a sort of a nut, too, from his wild talk since he's been in jail, and we think some crank must have been hanging around the factory here and got Conrad to listen to him."

"What sort of a crank?" The foreman's shrewd eyes stared straight into those of Odell.

"Oh, some, crazy, would-be inventor." The latter shrugged. "We have sort of sized Conrad up as a kind of fellow that would fall for a thing like that."

"Why?" The question came crisply.

"Well, we did find a paper on him that he seemed to set a lot of store by, but it don't mean anything. We showed it to an aviator from the field near Sunnymead, and he nearly laughed himself to death! Airplane machinery is your business and I brought it along to show you, thinking you could help us out. Of course, this is confidential."

Not for nothing had Odell sat up most of the night at Pettingill's cottage with the original document before him, painstakingly copying certain parts of the plans which conformed to those in a newspaper clipping of an engine in a well-advertised airplane, and adding crude devices of his own invention, together with a row of characters at the bottom traced from a laundry

ticket. He had bound it in the heavy, blue paper taken from the original, ruffled and crumpled it and smudged it with lampblack as though from much handling and had felt justifiably proud of the result; but now a qualm assailed him as he placed the fake document in the outstretched hand of this skeptical expert. Would the ruse upon which he had staked so much fail him now?

The foreman scanned it with an ill-concealed eagerness which gave place to amazed incredulity and finally contempt.

"Do you mean to say that this is the paper which was taken from Conrad Vorn?" he demanded.

"Took it off him myself!" maintained Odell stoutly. "He had it pinned up under his waistcoat and fought like a wildcat to keep it."

"Then it's a safe bet that they're both crazier than I thought!" Carroll laughed as he handed it back. "Mr. Latimer never saw this! He wouldn't give it a second glance, and if he really took some papers out to his home with him that can't be found now, they had nothing to do with this! I thought that Chinaman was a nut, for all his college education, and now I know."

"What Chinaman?" Odell asked, keeping his voice carefully under control although a wave of exultation swept over him.

"Fellow who called himself 'Sun' something. He wore regular clothes and you'd never have guessed he was Chinese only he let it out himself. He began hanging around the plant—but there goes the noon whistle! You'll have to excuse me. Tell your sheriff not

to make a fool of himself by showing that precious paper to anyone of the reporters, but to send Conrad back to his job."

A screaming siren had wailed out above the subdued hum of machinery, and men in seemingly countless numbers had begun to pour in a steady stream out of every available doorway. Odell laid his hand upon his companion's arm.

"Wait a minute! If we turn Conrad loose without learning the truth about this and convincing him he's all wrong, he'll do the talking to the newspaper guys before he gets back here, and they'll have the laugh on the plant as well as on our office! Can't you see that?—You eat at your boarding house, don't you, Mr. Carroll? Isn't there some restaurant around here where we can get a regular dinner and have a talk?"

"Sure, over at Cramers; but I've got to go tend to something inside for a minute and the trolley won't wait," Carroll responded.

"That jitney will, though, that those two fellows are getting out of in front of the superintendent's office!" exclaimed Odell. "I'll hold it and you hurry! We've got to hush this thing up!"

The "jitney," it developed, was a taxi which was returning to the township of Cramers in any event, and its driver was only too glad to pick up two fares. By the time he had backed it around to the entrance of the building which housed the assembling-rooms Carroll was ready and jumped in beside the supposed deputy.

"This is something like!" he observed. "You do get infernally sick of the hash and stew at Mrs. Swazey's!

—But you were asking me about that Chinaman. He was taller than they usually are and his eyes gave him away when once you knew, for they turned up at the corners, but he talked like any college swell though kind of slow as if he was watching his step. You can usually spot the cranks by their queer clothes and the excited way they act, but he looked for all the world like a gentleman; that's how he got by the watchman so often till they were wise to him."

"When did he first show up here?" asked Odell.

"Oh, I don't know! Along about a year and a half ago, I guess. He only came once or twice then, asking for Mr. Latimer, but I saw him one noon hour talking to Conrad Vorn and showing him some papers, and I heard Vorn say afterwards that it was a pity the fellow couldn't reach Mr. Latimer; that he had a great idea. I remember that last spring when this fellow showed up again and began raising ructions." Carroll glanced at the driver's head, which was half turned toward them. "I guess we hadn't better talk any more about this till we get there."

The taxi bounded forward with an indignant spurt, and when Odell had braced himself he said casually:

"I noticed as I left the superintendent's office that you were enlarging your plant. Will the company continue their building operations now?"

"Oh, you mean that reinforced concrete work? That's just for a row of new workmen's cottages. They are going to do away with the frame ones in time; the rate of insurance is too high."

Odell smiled and touched that significant bulge beneath his overcoat, and adroitly led the conversation

into desultory channels until they rattled down the main street of the little town and stopped before the doors of a neat, white lunchroom. Carroll, who had brushed his clothes until they bore a semblance of neatness while Odell was negotiating for the taxi, led the way into the restaurant and to a marble-topped table in the corner, where he joked with the waitress like an old acquaintance until she had taken their order and departed. Then he observed shrewdly:

"I guess you go heeled for any emergency down in your part of the country, Mr. Deputy. I see you're not taking off your overcoat."

Odell laughed.

"I didn't mean to come all dressed up like a western movie man!" he said. "We're a peaceful, sleepy little village most of the time, but since this murder and the things that have been happening the sheriff wants us to be ready on the job, and I forgot to change till I was in the train. Did you know Mr. Latimer?"

"Oh, he had a word for everyone when he was going the rounds of the plant, but I can't exactly say that I knew him personally," the foreman replied. "I guess he knew more about airplanes than any other man alive; this new one he developed that we are going to try out ought to be a world-beater! But you want to hear about that crazy Chinaman. It was about a year ago that he showed up again; I know, because Mr. Latimer had just married and was away on his honeymoon. We were making additions to the factory then and arrangements were under way to start on this new model I've just mentioned. Something must have leaked out to make this crank think we were going to

use his ideas. I guess he'd managed to see Mr. Latimer in the meantime with that fool plan you just showed me awhile ago and been turned down. Anyway, he made a couple of scenes and then the order went out to keep him away from the plant and off the company property. I remembered then how Vorn had been taken in by him before, because now he went around scowling and muttering for days, and only that he was such a good worker I would have turned him away, as I said."

The waitress had brought their dinner, and Carroll devoted himself to it with such gusto that Odell waited until his companion's appetite was partially appeased before continuing his interrogation.

At length, with a sigh of repletion, the foreman pushed away his plate, and his host bent across the table.

"That time that you saw the Chinaman showing Vorn the papers—did you see them, too?"

"No, but they had a blue cover like most of the plans and specifications which come our way at the factory; like the one you showed me this morning. It looked kind of old and mussed-up as if it had been carried around a long time; and when I saw those Chinese marks at the bottom it came over me all at once what it must be." Carroll stirred his coffee and chuckled. "Vorn must have gotten thicker with that crank during the past year than I supposed; but by summer the fellow had stopped coming around and I forgot all about him until now. I wonder what Conrad was doing with those plans, anyhow?"

That was a speculation which Odell did not care to encourage, and he asked hastily:

"Did you ever hear him speak of his brother?"

"Never knew he had one till all this stuff came out in the papers this morning," the foreman declared. "I thought it was funny when Conrad didn't show up for work after the noon hour yesterday, for I'd given him two days' straight leave from Tuesday noon, as he asked, and he'd never overstayed his time before. That's another thing that makes him valuable; you can always depend on him. I found out at his boarding place that he wasn't sick, and I didn't know what to think."

"Where does he board?"

"With another of my men, an oiler named Muller, whose old father keeps house for them when he ain't crippled up with rheumatism. Muller's a widower, and Conrad hates women; I never heard him say a good word for any of 'em yet, but I guess that's on account of what came out in the papers today about his brother's wife running away."

"Do the Mullers live in one of the company cottages?"

"In one of the old frame ones; fourth from the railroad track in the second row." Carroll pushed back his chair. "That was sure some feed, but we'll have to be stepping if we're going to get back on the job when the whistle blows!"

Odell paid the check and they hurried out to find seats on the rear platform of the last trolley for Latimer, while Carroll, refusing a cigarette, produced a blackened pipe and smoked in high good humor.

"How are your hours? Hard?" asked Odell as the car swung them out of the little town and through the muddy gray slush of the countryside. "Do you ever have any night work?"

"Only once in a great while when we're rushed, and then we are well paid for our overtime." Carroll sucked at his pipe. "We get it pretty easy."

"Your mechanics in the assembling-rooms have use for electric torches occasionally, then?" Odell persisted.

"Sure!" The other looked at him in a puzzled fashion. "Did your sheriff find one on Conrad and get suspicious? It's funny at that that he should have taken it all the way with him; but maybe he reckoned his brother's farm wouldn't be any too well lighted. Raised ducks, didn't he?"

Odell nodded.

"Mr. Latimer had a private office here at the plant, didn't he?"

"A whole building to himself; that square, ivy-covered brick one right near the superintendent's office," responded Carroll. "He used to spend hours there working away at his models. He was a hard man to work for in some ways; savage, and bullying and driving and turning off many a good man over a misunderstanding that he wouldn't listen to the right of. I guess I wouldn't be holding down my job now if I'd seen much of him, for I've a quick temper myself and I know my rights; but I'm not one to speak ill of the dead, though I don't wonder that somebody got to him at last!"

"He had enemies, then?" Odell spoke with studied

carelessness and followed with his eyes the arc of his cigarette stub as he threw it over the side of the speeding car.

"I don't know much about him, but I haven't heard a word of real regret among the men over his death, and some of them have worked for him since the factory was put up," Carroll remarked sagely. "When that happens there must have been something wrong with the boss, I figure. He had a regular row with some fellow who came out from the city to see him about six months ago, I remember. I stuck around hoping there'd be a fight, but it all ended quiet; only after the fellow had gone Latimer raged around like a bear with a sore head; fired two good hands for almost nothing and raised Cain with the plant generally. Whatever the scrap was about, I guess the other fellow had the best of it for once, and Latimer took it out on us."

"What did the other fellow look like? Did you hear any of it? You needn't be afraid to tell me, Mr. Carroll; I won't say where it came from, and I guess you weren't the only one around. Besides, you say it happened six months ago."

Carroll eyed him thoughtfully for a moment and then nodded.

"You've been pretty white with me and I ain't afraid to trust you, but I hate to bring in any question of a—a lady, and him married so lately; though perhaps it was his wife the row was about. The superintendent and plenty others heard it besides me. It was along about the middle of September—I remember it because I'd just come back from my vacation—when a tall

young gentleman swung off the train and coming up to me asked where he could find Mr. Latimer."

"Do you recall anything about him?"

"Only that he seemed to be about thirty and was smooth-shaven and tanned as if he'd been in the open air a lot, and he had a kind of a military swing to his shoulders. He was a gentleman, too, for all he was pleasant-spoken and democratic in his manner, with none of your patronizing airs; you can always tell the real thing, and I guess he had it all over Mr. Latimer right there, if the truth was known! I thought maybe he was an aviator come to see about the delivery of some planes, and I showed him which Mr. Latimer's office was, but told him we'd been given orders that he wasn't to be disturbed. The young man started right over, and though the superintendent tried to stop him he walked right in without even knocking."

"What happened?" Odell asked eagerly.

"Nothing at first, though I expected an explosion. The young man's voice was real low, but all at once Latimer let a roar out of him like a bull. It was then that I thought the fight would start, but I was mistaken. The young man went right on talking and never raised his voice, and the very coolness of him made it seem as though he had the whip in hand and knew it, even if you couldn't hear a word he said from outside. You could hear Latimer, though, when he broke in to swear, but that's all he did do; and after a while he stopped that, so they must have got down to business.

"The general manager and his assistant and the superintendent and two or three other foremen be-

sides me was gathered around, for nothing like that had ever happened before and we was wondering what would come next; but we scattered quick when the two of them showed themselves in the door. Latimer was purple in the face and swearing again, and the young man looked as cool and smiling as when he had come; but I saw there was a glint in his eyes that hadn't been there before, and there was a kind of an edge to his voice, too.

"That's all, Mr. Latimer," he says. "She hasn't anyone else in the world to protect her, but I'm here, and I'll be close at hand to see that you do the right thing by her. If you don't, you know now what will happen to you."

"Maybe I haven't got the exact words, but that was what he said as near as I can remember," Carroll continued. "He walked off without looking back and caught a train that was just pulling in at the platform, and Mr. Latimer let him go; then he went ram-paging round the works, as I have told you."

The car had stopped at the entrance to the plant and as they alighted Odell remarked mendaciously:

"I guess it would be hard to go back six months and find that fellow, especially as his description don't fit anybody we know of in connection with Mr. Latimer; but it shows he had enemies, all right, women as well as men, and we'll have our work cut out for us to find out who killed him." He added as though in an afterthought: "Oh, there's one thing more I'd like to ask you. Do you know the name of a steel tool about eighteen inches long with octagonal sides three-quarters of an inch thick or so? One end is

curved with forked tips and the other flat and pointed like a file—”

Carroll laughed.

“You mean a small pinch-bar, I guess.” he replied. “We don’t do anything with ’em; they’re used mostly to pry off the forms in reinforced concrete construction, but they’re handy for a lot of other things besides. — We’re just in time! There’s the whistle again!”

Once more the screaming siren cut into their conversation, and this time Odell secretly welcomed it although he held out his hand in seeming regret.

“Well, so long, and thank you for telling me what you have. If ever you’re out Sunnymead way look me up; my name’s Odell. I’ll tip off the sheriff and I guess you’ll have that crazy nut Conrad Vorn back in a day or two if you want him. Good-bye.”

He waited until the loquacious foreman had disappeared in the factory door and then hurried off in the direction of the railroad. Passing the company platform, he continued on to the second row of neat wooden cottages and knocked upon the door of the fourth to which he came.

After an interval shuffling footsteps sounded from within and the door opened to reveal the bent form and wrinkled features of a very old man who peered at the stranger in myopic inquiry.

“You’re Mr. Muller?” Odell began with grim sternness, and at the old man’s nod he added: “Sorry, sir, but I’m an officer of the law sent here to examine the room of your lodger Conrad Vorn, and I hope I won’t have to make any trouble for you. Vorn’s held down

on Long Island on a charge of murdering his boss, Mr. Gilbert Latimer!"

He displayed his shield, but it was unnecessary, for his bluff had worked. Almost with his first words the old man, trembling suddenly as though palsied, had thrown wide the door obsequiously.

"Come right in, Officer, right in!" he invited in a cracked, quavering voice. "My son read me the news in the paper this morning, but Conrad never did it, sir, never! His room is just at the head of the stairs and you're welcome to go right up; nothing ain't been touched since he left. We're peaceful, law-abiding folks and my own son works over to the Latimer factory. To think of Conrad being accused of murder! It's dretful, sir, dretful!"

He followed, lamenting, up the stairs, and Odell entered a small room upon the simple furnishings of which the fast-accumulating coal dust from the forest of smokestacks outside bore ample testimony to the truth of old Muller's statement that it had remained undisturbed.

Perfunctorily he examined the dingy bed and ransacked the drawers of the dresser, which contained merely a scant but neatly arranged supply of wearing apparel. Then he approached the ancient, round-topped trunk which stood in one corner. With the old man's dismayed eyes upon him he drew from beneath his coat the unwieldy object he had carried all day. It was an octagonal-sided steel tool about eighteen inches long such as he had described to the foreman, and using the curved, forked end as a handle

he applied the flat, sharpened point to the rusty lock and jimmied it off.

The trunk contained more clothes, faded and weather-worn, and scattered among them a handful of letters addressed in a scrawling hand and post-marked "Sunnymead."

Pocketing these and retrieving the pinch-bar, Odell reassured the trembling old man briefly and took his departure.

Ten minutes later he was seated in the smoker of a train bound for the city; and although success beyond his anticipations had greeted him at every turn there was no elation in his face. He was thinking of the foreman's story of the quarrel six months before and his description of the man who had sworn to protect "her." Had he not seen that man in the drawing-room at Willow Brook only two days ago? Could it be other than Starr Agnew?

CHAPTER XV.

UNDER NIGHT SKIES

“WELL, well, Mr. Odell! Glad to see you back again so soon!”

Hiram Claggett extended a horny hand in welcome as, at dusk on the evening of the same day, Barry Odell descended from the train at Sunnymead.

Odell shook hands and then put down his bag on the station platform.

“Take care of this for me, will you, Mr. Claggett, while I run over to the county jail?” he asked. “I don’t suppose you know whether I’ll find the sheriff there or not? I want to have a little talk with the Vorns.”

“I guess likely you will.” The baggage master chuckled importantly. “Two city fellows who came out on the ten o’clock train this morning have been hanging around the jail ever since, and Constable Price is all up in the air because he can’t get a thing out of either of them. I saw him and the sheriff and the district attorney, too, hot-footing it over there not ten minutes ago.”

Odell crossed the square and passing the courthouse ascended the steps of the jail. In the doorway he beheld the constable, red with indignation, and behind him appeared the sheepish but dogged faces of two old acquaintances from Headquarters.

"Good afternoon, Constable." he said pleasantly. "Hello, boys! Is the sheriff here?"

"Barry!" John Pettingill hurried forward in surprise and grasping rather than shaking the hand of his late guest drew him into a side room and closed the door. "What on earth have you been up to? When I asked you to take a hand in the Latimer case unofficially with me I didn't mean for you to drag in the whole police force of New York! Those two plainclothes men out there—!"

"Oh, I dropped in at Headquarters this morning to see my chief and get my leave of absence extended as you wanted me to, and I asked him to send down a couple of the boys to keep an eye on the Vorns when the magistrate releases them," Odell explained with an air of bland innocence. "I thought you'd want me to, John, for you and the constable will be busy with the murder case, and you know there'll be a separate charge against the Vorns in connection with that stolen document. It would be a bad thing for you if they slipped through your fingers at the last minute, for I've found the real owner of it; at least, I know who he is."

"Oh, you do, do you?" The sheriff's tone was slightly uncomfortable. "It wasn't Latimer's, then?"

"No. It belonged to a Chinese gentleman you've heard of before, named Sun Hsu."

"Well, we needn't be in any hurry to look him up till I find the cover of it," Pettingill observed. "I could have sworn it was all right when I brought it back after the inquest was over yesterday, but this morning I found that the blue paper cover was gone."

"I borrowed it." Odell laughed. "Oh, I know I ought to have told you and asked permission, but you told me to go at this thing in my own way and I have. I've found out a lot too, that'll interest you; can we go and have a little talk with the Vorns?"

"Hadn't you better tell me about it first, Barry?" The sheriff hesitated. "You're moving pretty fast, and I'd like to be a little sure of my ground."

"I can't, because the Vorns will have to tell some of the story themselves and I've got to persuade them to do it in my own way. But no matter what I spring on them, John, don't queer my game. I know the whole part they played in last Tuesday night's affair and can prove each step of the way, but if they confess you'll save that much time and have a lot more to your credit."

"All right." The sheriff responded to the artful inducement. "Come on; it's almost time for their supper. Do you want the district attorney in on this or those policemen of yours?"

There was a note of professional jealousy in his tone, and Odell shook his head smilingly.

"No, old man! This is strictly our party."

They found Chris Vorn shaken and slightly dazed from his twenty-four hours in jail, but his brother was as blusteringly defiant as ever. It was to the latter that Odell first addressed himself.

"Conrad," he began sternly, "you are employed as a mechanic under Carroll, the foreman of the assembling rooms out at the Latimer plant, and you board with Muller and his father."

"I made no secret of it!" Conrad retorted, although his color changed.

"About a year and a half ago an educated Chinaman named Sun Hsu appeared at the factory and tried to see Mr. Latimer, to interest him in an invention of his to start and land airplanes within the space of their own length," continued Odell. "You talked with him, saw his plans and realized that there was a fortune in them. He only came once or twice then and you didn't see your way clear to making anything for yourself out of his invention. A few months later, however, Mr. Latimer began enlarging his factory and arranging to put out under his own patent the same model planes as the Chinaman had invented, and you knew that Mr. Latimer must have stolen the idea from Sun Hsu."

The sheriff gasped audibly, but Odell gave him a warning glance as he went on:

"You got word to Sun Hsu and he came down and protested, but it did no good because he had been too skeptical of American laws to have his invention patented or even copied; he had trusted Mr. Latimer with the original plans and Latimer had kept them. You conceived the idea then of stealing the plans from Latimer and selling them back to Sun Hsu, but they were in the New York office and you had no opportunity."

"Prove it!" exclaimed Conrad furiously. "You are framing up this whole story just as you framed up the rest of it—!"

"Am I? Wait till I finish.—You knew that Latimer had bought this place down here next to your brother's

farm and that he had closed the short cut and your brother was angry about it. You found out that the plans were to be brought down to Willow Brook and you wrote to Chris and told him of the good thing in it for both of you if you could get hold of them; that it would not be stealing because they did not rightfully belong to Latimer, anyway."

"I knew it!" Chris moaned. "Oh, Conrad, why should you bring such troubles upon me?"

"Hold your tongue!" commanded his brother fiercely. "This is all lies! He can prove nothing!"

"You found out that Latimer was to bring the plans down on Tuesday, and although Chris had tried to stop you in his letters—these letters which I have here" (Odell held out the bundle of letters which he had taken from the trunk in the Muller home)—"you came here to break into the Latimer house at night and steal the plans. You brought with you your electric torch and this pinch-bar which you took from where those new cottages are being built of reinforced concrete inside the company's property."

As Odell held before him the steel tool Conrad for the first time showed signs of breaking.

"How do you know?" he demanded hoarsely. "It is a lie! Nobody saw me!"

"Don't be so sure!" Odell warned him. "After you got here your nerve failed you and you couldn't do the job alone, so you persuaded your brother to join you. You two waited by the hedge in the south pasture till you saw all the lights in the Latimer house go out and you thought everyone was asleep, and then you started with the pinch-bar to force open a win-

dow downstairs. You made Chris go on ahead because he knew the way, and he carried the pinch-bar while you had your electric torch. But Chris came face to face with Latimer himself and ran down among the willows by the pond to hide, and there he *killed* Latimer with the pinch-bar—!"

"No, no! I swear it, no!" With a wild shriek Chris Vorn had fallen upon his knees. "I found him there dead already! I did not kill him! I will tell all!"

Conrad with a muttered curse sprang forward, but Odell caught him, and the dumbfounded sheriff, galvanized into sudden action, came to his aid. Chris gave no heed, but groveling upon the floor told his story between great gasping sobs.

"It is all true, what you say about Conrad wanting to take the plans which did not belong to Latimer and sell them back to the heathen! I saw no harm, I hated Latimer for taking from me the short cut, and I was willing to help. We waited by the hedge until much later than you say; it must have been ten o'clock or after, for we saw the automobile go away and return and then waited an hour, glad that Latimer had gone and our task, it would be so much easier. I hated that automobile, too! Only that afternoon it had nearly run me down and I had cursed it and the man who owned it and who stole from others the work of their brains, even if they were heathen!

"When we started for the house at last I made Conrad come around by the edge of the pond because I was afraid of the huge dog, and so—and so we came upon Latimer lying dead there on his face in the snow! Conrad was frightened then and he would have run

away, but I said we had come for the plans and the plans we should have! Conrad said then that perhaps Latimer had meant to take them away with him and that they would be in his bag which was lying there because they were too big and thick for him to carry with comfort in his pocket.

"We carried the bag off into the holly trees and I held the electric torch so that it should not be seen from the house while Conrad searched the bag and found the plans as he had thought. We tried then to break the ice of the brook that we might sink the bag so no one should know the plans were gone, but the pinch-bar was not strong enough. It was I then who thought of the anchor which I had so often seen on the seat of the old rowboat when I passed that way, and we pried it loose with the pinch-bar and broke the ice and dropped in the bag.

"We thought the brook would freeze over again by morning, and Conrad went to put back the anchor; but he stumbled and dropped it by the body of Latimer and he would not touch it again! He ran off home with the plans, and I—I had to pick up that anchor, wet with Latimer's blood, and put it in the boat!

"Then, I, too, ran for home, but all the way I could feel my mitten wet with that blood which I had not spilled, I swear it! I could feel it soaking into my hand as though I was the murderer, and I almost felt that I had been! I went a little crazy for a minute, I think: I tore off that mitten and threw it from me, and you found it the next day, sir, though after my little girl had taken it into the house and you asked for it again I gave you the other one which had not been stained.

That is all the story; you know the rest. I swear to you that I am innocent! We stole the plans, but it was to return them to the man who owned them, and it is not theft to steal from a thief, living or dead! Neither Conrad nor I raised a hand against Latimer, he was still warm but dead when we came upon him! That with my last breath can I say! It is the truth!"

In a measure the man's self-control had returned, and there was no mistaking the ring of solemn sincerity in his final words.

Odell grasped him by the shoulders and forced him to meet his eyes.

"Chris Vorn, is that *all* the truth? If neither you nor your brother killed Latimer, do you know who did? Remember, if you lie now you may go to prison for life or to the chair! *Who killed Latimer?*"

"I do not know, so help me God! We saw nothing, heard nothing! There was only Latimer lying there on his face under the sky of the night!"

CHAPTER XVI.

SUN HSU DECIDES

IT WAS after supper at the Pettingill cottage that night, and with Mrs. Pettingill's tactful withdrawal the sheriff and Odell had settled down to a smoke and a discussion of the events of the late afternoon.

"Barry, did you have a suspicion of the truth about the Vorns when you went this morning?" the sheriff demanded. "Was that why you faked up those plans and stole the cover off the original?"

"I didn't think that either of them was the murderer; I told you so yesterday," responded his young guest. "When we first found the anchor loosened from the frost in which it had become embedded in the bow of that row-boat I thought it was the implement for which I had been looking; not the weapon with which the murder was committed, but the heavy, sharp instrument which had been used to hack that jagged hole in the ice of the brook through which the bag had been sunk. The discovery of the blood on the fluke of it stumped me for a minute. Then I realized that such a contingency need not interfere with my previously formed theory; the anchor, after being used to break the ice, might have been accidentally dropped close to Latimer's body, so that one of its flukes touched the blood, and then been returned to its former resting place in the boat."

"You hit on the truth, too," the sheriff commented. "The confession of the Vorns lets them out of the suspicion of murder, but if Latimer wasn't killed by the anchor or the pinch-bar, what sort of weapon was used?"

A rattling little car had driven up to the gate and now the stamp of feet could be heard on the porch and the doorbell rang. The sheriff himself replied to it. When he saw who his visitor was he exclaimed heartily:

"Come in, Doc! Barry's back, and I was just wondering whether we'd find you home if we waded over to your house."

"Wait till I get off my goloshes; don't want to track up Mrs. Pettingill's sitting-room," Dr. Hale responded as he struggled with his ungainly footgear and then walked in, his genial, elderly face beaming. "Good evening, Sergeant. You certainly put in a busy day to good purpose! I've been hearing all about it from the district attorney."

"How are you, Doctor?" Odell shook the outstretched hand. "I haven't done very much, as far as actual progress goes. The sheriff and I merely got a statement from the Vorn brothers that they did not kill Latimer. I don't know what John has done in my absence today, but I myself haven't gone a step on the way of proving the identity of the real murderer."

The coroner turned once more to the sheriff.

"John, are you prepared to accept the Vorns' confession as the whole truth?"

"Yes," replied his host. "It clears up a lot that we

didn't understand before and only strengthens my original view of the case."

"But the supposition that the Vorns may be the actual murderers is still circumstantially more strong than anything you can advance, for they had in their possession a weapon which from a medical standpoint is far more likely to have caused that wound than the anchor," Dr. Hale remonstrated. "I mean that thing you call a pinch-bar. You know I was never satisfied about that anchor."

The sheriff smiled.

"Take that chair by the fire, Doc, and light up your pipe," he invited. "Barry and I were just discussing that weapon when you came. If I remember, you said the blow must have been more crushing than penetrating; that the heavier the weapon used, the lighter the strength behind it must have been. Am I right?"

The coroner nodded.

"I told you that the fluke of that anchor was so sharp as well as heavy that it would have been liable to split Latimer's head clean in two."

"But the end of that pinch-bar was sharp enough to pry the anchor loose from where it had been frozen in the boat," Pettingill reminded him slyly.

"That pinch-bar has two ends!" retorted Dr. Hale. "I've just been looking at it in the district attorney's office. If the rounded end had been brought down on the left side of Latimer's forehead it would have caused just such a blow as the one that killed him, provided there was force enough behind it. A steel bar is a formidable weapon and not much strength

would have been required to crush the frontal and left temporal."

"But suppose neither the anchor nor the pinch-bar were used, and there wasn't such a terrible lot of strength behind that blow, what other weapon would have cause the wound?" the sheriff asked. "I'm not asking you to suggest any specific object, but something of its general weight and size and shape."

"I couldn't do that, John," The coroner hedged cautiously. "Anything rounded but with edges—remember, the pinch-bar has octagonal sides sharply defined—and about as heavy as that, I suppose. A hammer, or a wrench, or something of that sort.—I hear that Conrad Vorn told you where this Sun Hsu can be found?"

He addressed Odell, who had been quietly listening to the discussion between the two men, and the latter nodded.

"Yes. The sheriff wants me to interview him tomorrow, find out if the plans are still his property and whether or not he wants to bring action."

"Against a dead man?" Dr. Hale raised his bushy eyebrows.

"Hardly." Odell smiled. "The plans will be restored to him after their possible usefulness as evidence has passed, but Vorn may have already approached him with a view to obtaining money for their return, and Sun Hsu may want to prefer charges of extortion against him. When Chris Vorn had confessed his part in the scheme and told the story of that scene down by the pond, Conrad broke down also, and corroborating his brother incidentally con-

firmed all the facts and surmises of mine. I've seen men break before, and I am convinced that they were both telling all they knew."

"Well, I must confess that you have taken the wind out of my sails about the stranger at the station," Dr. Hale observed.

"Which stranger?" asked Odell quickly. "You mean the one who arrived at four o'clock on the afternoon of the murder, don't you? How about the other that evening, the last man with whom Latimer was seen alive?"

"I'd almost forgotten about him." The coroner turned to his host once more. "John, did you get any trace of him yet?"

The sheriff shook his head.

"I'd be ready to believe that Hiram Clagget invented him, only I know he hasn't got that much imagination," he said. "I had a long talk with him today, on Barry's idea that the man might not have been a real stranger, only someone he didn't know very well; but Hi stuck to it that he hadn't noticed the fellow particularly and wouldn't know him again if he saw him. The fact is that Hi never did like Latimer, who seems to have antagonized everybody around pretty generally, and after that fresh answer he gave when Latimer asked if the train would be on time he kept away from him. I guess that man don't matter very much, not in the light of some things I learned today."

There was a note of long-suppressed satisfaction in his tones, and the other two gazed at him expectantly.

"You told us that you were going up to Willow Brook to have a talk with that young man you are

so sure is in love with Mrs. Latimer." Dr. Hale frowned. "Did you see him and find out where he was in his car between five o'clock and midnight on Tuesday?"

The sheriff bit into a fresh cigar and sat back in his chair.

"Oh, I saw him all right," he responded. "Just as I expected, he wouldn't say where he had been on the day of the murder. He seemed to think my questioning highly amusing at first; then he tried to be proud and haughty; and then finally he got mad and said he wouldn't answer a single question until he had seen his lawyers. That's a pretty frank admission that he knows more than he pretends to, anyway, and I guess my next move'll make him talk fast enough!"

"Your next move?" Odell repeated.

"You two know what I've had in mind from the start," the sheriff retorted stubbornly. "I talked with other people today up at Willow Brook besides just Mr. Agnew, and I'm pretty near ready to act! The folks of this county will sympathize with poor half-cracked Chris Vorn, anyway, no matter what they think of his brother for getting him into this mess, and when it begins to travel round tomorrow that he isn't being held any longer on the murder charge I'll have to work quick."

Odell diplomatically refrained from comment, but the coroner, with the artless candor of a life-long association with John Pettingill, demanded:

"When you start this quick work of yours, which one are you going to apply for a warrant for, Agnew or Mrs. Latimer? Have you any evidence, even cir-

cumstantial, against him except his refusal to answer questions? That seems natural enough to me; nobody wants to be dragged into the notoriety of a case. You said yourself yesterday that you couldn't charge Mrs. Latimer with killing her husband unless you had something more to go upon than just your notion of a love affair and that torn scrap of fur from the coat.

The sheriff smiled enigmatically, and then a dull flush spread over his lean, honest face.

"Yesterday was yesterday," he remarked. "I told you I'd been talking with other folks up at Willow Brook today. Although I'd rather do things in an open, straightforward fashion, there are times when an officer of the law has to come pretty near to sneaking to get what he wants. I'm waiting now for just one thing—"

All three men had been so interested in their subject that they had heard no footsteps on the porch and they started as a light, nervous tapping sounded upon the door. Dr. Hale and Odell glanced at each other as the sheriff, with a muttered ejaculation, sprang from his chair and hurrying out into the front entry carefully closed the sitting-room door behind him.

Each was unconscious of the fact that the silence between them remained unbroken and that they were inadvertently straining their ears to catch what was going on outside. They heard the front door open and high, excited feminine tones which were quickly interrupted and hushed by the deeper voice of Pettingill. A brief and indistinguishable conversation

ensued, a moment of silence, and then the woman's voice rose once more.

"Thank you, sir. Oh, if I've done wrong I'll never forgive myself, but you said—!"

"That's all right!" the sheriff interrupted again gruffly. "What I said goes, and you've nothing to worry about. Good night."

The front door closed and the coroner and Odell averted their eyes, each guiltily conscious of eavesdropping; but Pettingill did not at once return to his guests.

Dr. Hale cleared his throat with unnecessary loudness.

"I'm glad you brought that point up again about the man at the station, Sergeant," he observed. "It's an important one and I don't believe that anything—er—drastic can be done until he is found or that incident explained."

"I hope that nothing will be done hastily," responded Odell. "I went into town this morning in the same car with four of your fellow citizens, and judging from their various points of view, public opinion seems to be held in abeyance, waiting for John's next move. But he is right about two things; they sympathize with Chris Vorn and showed plainly that Latimer has taken no trouble to make himself popular around here."

"Did you learn who they were?" the coroner asked.

"Well, there was one cocky, loud-voiced little man who talked about life insurance—"

"Blair Saunders!" Dr. Hale exclaimed.

Odell nodded.

"A brisk, red-headed chap called Jim and a middle-aged, meek sort of man that the rest called Howard sat with the first one," Odell went on. "He complained that his wife and his boss at the office both made him stop smoking, and I took him to be a clerk of some sort."

"If the red-headed fellow said anything about real estate he was Jim Snell, and the other is Howard Means." The coroner checked them off. "He's almost as henpecked as Charley Tilbury, and doesn't dare call his soul his own."

"Nevertheless, he was the first one to venture the suggestion that the last man seen talking to Latimer, the one at the station, ought to be looked up." Odell paused and then went on: "I got into casual conversation with them and later alone with Farwell, that young artist who lives opposite Mrs. Vail. Know him, Doctor?"

"Yes, I've been treating him lately for his throat; he was in the war, you know, and had practically one whole side of his jaw blown to bits by shrapnel. He's an interesting sort of fellow—told me a lot about the wonderful strides they've made in surgery over there.—I wonder what's keeping John."

"Perhaps someone has sent for him in a hurry," Odell suggested, knowing full well that the other was aware of the mendacity of his remark, for both were acutely conscious that the sheriff was still in the front entry, just outside that closed door. "Farwell seemed a likable chap and he must get rather lonely, living

there all by himself. He mentioned a sister of his; did you ever see her?"

"I never met her, but she has been down once or twice to see him. She is a very striking looking woman." The coroner paused in his turn and then continued: "Did he have any theory to advance about the murder? He'd look at it from a different standpoint, I imagine, than the other three you mentioned."

"He did," Odell replied slowly. "As a matter of fact, he has drawn his own conclusions from the meeting Latimer had with the unknown man at the station and his sudden decision to return and prowl about the grounds of Willow Brook."

"Prowl about?" Dr. Hale's eyebrows went up once more. "You don't mean—?"

"That Farwell has formed the same opinion of the case as John, I am afraid," Odell finished the question. "A more general public than that bounded by the horizon of Sunnymeade will agree with him if John—"

He paused abruptly as a rapid step or two crossed the entry and the sheriff opened the door at last. His eyes were snapping with excitement and there was an air of ill-suppressed triumph about him although he tried to speak casually.

"Well, I've got it!" he announced. "The one thing I was waiting for!"

"What is it?" asked the coroner. "Proof as to who murdered Latimer?"

"No, but proof enough of a motive," Pettingill replied. "Circumstantial evidence, but it's strong enough for me to go before a jury with tomorrow!"

Dr. Hale knocked the ashes from his pipe and rose. "I've got a long road to travel tomorrow with half the county laid up and the little old car not running as she ought to," he said slowly. "I guess I'll be getting on home. You know your own business best, John, but no matter what your circumstantial evidence is, remember you've got to have more than a motive and a piece of brown fur to convict anyone of murder."

After the doctor's departure the sheriff turned to Odell, who had also risen, and shook his head.

"Stubborn as a mule!" he exclaimed of his late guest. "Have you got anything up your sleeve, Barry, that you haven't told me?"

"Nothing but a question." Odell smiled. "I've got to answer it myself, though, and you would think I was crazy if I sprung it on you now. I'll get that eight-ten train in to town tomorrow and interview our friend Sun Hsu."

But Odell was careful to miss that particular train the following morning and caught the commuter's special instead, of which the real estate operator had told him on the previous day. No one else got on at Sunnymeade except a portly, well-groomed man of about fifty, and he merely bestowed a casual glance at the detective and then with a grunt retired behind a newspaper until the city was reached.

There Odell took a taxi and gave the driver an address which was far uptown near the University. Alighting before a huge modern apartment house, he told the driver to wait and entered the imposing doorway.

"Does a gentleman named Mr. Sun Hsu live here?" he demanded of the switchboard attendant.

"Sure, if you mean the high-brow Chink—" the latter began, but at Odell's expression he added hastily, "I don't know whether Mr. Soo is in or not. What name, sir?"

"Just say, please, that a special agent has come up from Sunnymeade, Long Island, to see him."

The attendant turned to the telephone and delivered the required message, and in another moment the reply came.

"You can go right up, sir. Apartment twenty-one."

The detective had no need to be directed to the right number, for as he stepped from the elevator on the second floor a wide entrance door facing him stood open and a Chinaman in native attire with a long queue over his shoulder stood bowing before him. The man was very old and his round brown face was a mass of fine, inscrutable lines.

"You speak Mistler Hsu?" His voice was as thin and attenuated as a drawn-out thread of sound. "Light down hall, sir, dlawing-loom; Mistler Hsu, he come."

Upon a rug of gorgeous coloring, in the deep pile of which his feet sank noiselessly, Odell traversed the hall to a great, square room at the farther end furnished luxuriously in teak and lacquer, with silken hangings covering the walls from which innumerable gold threads glinted back the sunlight which flooded in at the bay window.

No one was visible, but as Odell seated himself a sixth sense warned him that from some hidden peep-hole among those glittering hangings keen eyes were

taking him in from head to foot. After an appreciable interval a smaller door at the side opened and a young man in the most correct of London-made clothes came gravely forward. He was of medium height and slender, with a sallowness of complexion which might have been that of Southern Italy save the tell-tale upward slant at the outer corners of the small, dark, exceedingly bright eyes.

Odell rose.

"Mr. Hsu?"

The young man bowed.

"I have been expecting you, Mr. Odell."

Involuntarily the detective started. He had purposely given no name, and he found himself wondering just how much this wily individual knew.

Mr. Hsu seated himself, and motioning again toward the chair before which Odell stood he observed as though in explanation:

"I read the morning papers and I was naturally interested; so much, in fact, that half an hour ago I telephoned out to your most efficient sheriff to find out who his clever subordinate was."

"I see. I have come, Mr. Hsu, to bring you the assurance of the district attorney that the plans of your invention will be returned to you intact as soon as it has been decided that they will not be needed as evidence at the trial of anyone for the murder of Mr. Latimer, and you have gone through the legal formality of proving ownership. It did not require any special cleverness on my part to obtain the confession of the Vorn brothers, and my secondary pur-

pose in seeing you is to discover whether or not you decide to prosecute Conrad Vorn."

"Prosecute him? Why?" the other asked coolly. "He supposed he had rendered me a service in recovering my plans for me."

"He has not approached you, then, with an offer to obtain them for you—at a price?"

Mr. Hsu regarded his questioner with polite astonishment.

"No. I have not seen the fellow since my last call at the Latimer plant in New Jersey, about eight months ago, and I had almost forgotten him until this regrettable affair. I thought him most intelligent for a mechanic, but a little erratic in his ideas. I cannot tell you how he obtained my address, but it was known in the Latimer offices." The monotonous voice without a trace of accent or mannerism except a certain deliberation of speech went on: "Had he succeeded in his endeavors you would have called it extortion, would you not? Attempted extortion, rather, for his efforts would have been in vain. I should never have paid him a single penny for the return of those plans, Mr. Odell."

Odell stared. If this bland person before him were indeed Sun Hsu,—and his appearance bore out Starr Agnew's description of him,—why would he not have been willing to pay for the return of the specifications of the invention of which he had been robbed, and which he had been so anxious to regain that he had made scenes at both the Latimer plant and the city offices of the company? He had even threatened picturesquely to crack Latimer's skull, and now that

precisely such a death had come to his enemy he called it a "regrettable affair!"

Could there be something sinister and as yet unconceived behind the calm courtesy of his manner, the singularly disinterested attitude he appeared to maintain? That devilish, poetically delivered threat recurred to the detective's mind and with it a new and startling possibility; but as though reading his thoughts Sun Hsu remarked:

"You think it strange, no doubt, in view of the report you must have received of my visits upon the late Mr. Latimer; but many months have elapsed and time brings counsel in all things. I was impulsive, violent. I lost control of myself, but the little toy planes were the product of my brain and I had been despoiled of them; I was in truth like one mad. Once in a moment of blind anger I threatened the late Mr. Latimer with almost the sort of death which must have been his—only in English it sounds so crude, does it not, a mere fracture of the skull?"

He was smiling faintly, steadily now, and Odell, who had faced the coolest of criminals and the burliest of ruffians undaunted, felt an inward shudder.

"We heard of that threat, of course, Mr. Hsu," he admitted frankly. "It was an odd coincidence—"

"So odd that if you will forgive my interruption it would be perhaps as well if I told you where I spent last Tuesday evening." He waved aside Odell's perfunctory gesture of remonstrance and continued blandly: "I dined and remained until long past midnight at the rooms of a very eminent and learned friend of mine over at the university; the professor

of ancient and modern Asiatic languages. His word that I was his guest will, I think, be sufficient to eliminate me if I should by any chance be under suspicion of the murder. But indeed, the death of Mr. Latimer caused me profound sorrow. It was my wish that he should live to produce the airplanes manufactured from my plans. That is why I would not have paid any money to Conrad Vorn for their return."

That unchanging smile and the glitter of those bright, beady eyes was getting on Odell's almost impregnable nerves, and the man's attitude was becoming more and more incomprehensible. Could he be putting up a supreme bluff? Then a practicable explanation crossed the detective's mind and he smiled also.

"You mean, Mr. Hsu, that you had undeniable proof that the invention was yours and had been stolen by Mr. Latimer?" he asked. "You meant to wait until every cent of his capital was swallowed up in the production of those airplanes and they were successfully launched upon the market and then ruin him? You would have been justified, of course."

Sun Hsu shook his head and rose.

"No, Mr. Odell. I would never have exposed the theft, had I been in a position to do so. It was my one ambition to see those Latimer airplanes rise like so many little birds, each bearing a hireling of the unfortunately late Mr. Latimer's, and like so many little birds when they are riddled with shot, crash to the earth!" The monotonous voice had at last risen a note and now it mounted to a subdued but hideous falsetto like a malicious chant. "You see, Mr. Odell,

it was I—I alone, who discovered the flaw in my invention! The single little flaw which would let the planes rise straight from the ground to a certain height and then they would fall like a shooting star! It was only after Mr. Latimer had stolen my plans and prepared to put the product of my brain upon the market that I realized the error in them which all his experts had missed, and it was then that I ceased to molest him. I guarded the secret of it well! I wanted to see the planes finished and tried out! I wanted to watch with my own eyes while those lesser vultures in his employ rose in the air, and wheeled, and circled, and fell with broken wings! Now, perhaps, you understand.”

Odell got up from his chair, conscious of a choking horror, an overwhelming desire to get away from the smiling, dapper fiend in Bond Street garb who had planned such a malignantly misdirected revenge.

“Yes,” he heard himself saying in a cool matter-of-fact tone, “it would have been more—more dramatic than an appeal to the law-courts, more satisfying after the injustice you had endured.—But please believe, Mr. Hsu, that you were never for a moment under suspicion. Mr. Latimer may have injured others almost as deeply as you, and one of them may have been less subtle, less wise and patient in his method of punishment.”

Sun Hsu spread out his small, claw-like hands in disavowal.

“I know of none such,” he said. “If I could aid the cause of justice I should be honored to do so, but in a little while when the plans of my poor, foolish toy

are once more in my possession I shall return to my own country that my people may perhaps benefit if I find a way to correct that single little flaw which still remains. Please convey my thanks to the district attorney and tell him that should he desire my presence I am at his service."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CONFERENCE

ODELL felt a surge of infinite relief as he slammed the door of his taxi and started back to the station. Sun Hsu was indeed eliminated as a factor in the case, for every word of his atrocious recital of his plan for a distorted vengeance had borne the stamp of truth, and the detective was heartily glad to be able to dismiss him from his thoughts.

He succeeded in catching a train which was just pulling out for Sunnymead, and as he alighted once more on the bare little platform before the station the first man he encountered was his red-headed acquaintance of the day before. The latter gave him a cold bow and was moving off hastily, but Odell stopped him.

"Good morning, Mr. Snell!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "I didn't have to hike it out West after all, you see. When I got to Headquarters yesterday I found a message had come for me from here while we were crawling along in that old rattler, detailing me to help the sheriff and check up on Chris Vorn's brother. I did, and I found I was dead wrong in what I told you fellows yesterday.—Going up street? I'll walk along with you as far as the court house."

Jim Snell gave grudging assent, and as they started off he eyed his uninvited companion somewhat askance ;

but Odell continued as though unaware of the reserve in the other's manner:

"Yes, sir, I'm always willing to admit it when I've made a mistake, and one of the biggest we city police detectives make is to underrate small-town stuff. Some of the greatest crime mysteries of the country have been pulled off in peaceful places like Sunnymeade. I suppose you've heard that we're going to let both the Vorns go?"

"No," Snell replied quickly. "I don't know anything about the case beyond what I read in the papers."

"Then you know about those plans they took from Latimer's bag when they found him lying dead by the pond," Odell chattered on garrulously. "They weren't worth much, and the man who drew them won't even bother to get after Conrad Vorn. Has anything new happened since early morning?"

"I've been busy in my office," he said constrainedly. His manner had thawed, however, and he added: "I did hear that Latimer's funeral was held and the body taken away two or three hours ago, but I supposed you knew that."

"I didn't," Odell responded mendaciously. "It's too bad I missed it, but I don't believe I could have picked up anything that would have been of any use in finding out who killed him. I've kind of come to the conclusion that your friend in the train yesterday — the little man with the gray chin-whiskers—was about right when he said that anybody could have got out to Willow Brook at that time of night without being noticed particularly. The murderer might have come in a machine from almost anywhere. If this was a

city job I'd know how to handle it all right, but I'm like a fish out of water. I wish I could find somebody who heard another car besides Latimer's around there that night."

"I don't know of anybody," Snell remarked. "I live right here in town so as to be near the school on account of the kids, and I was home all Tuesday evening, playing cards with my wife and some of the neighbors. First I heard of the murder was when the constable told me next morning."

"Well, I've got to leave you here." Odell paused at the court house steps and spoke with as much regret as though his company had been urgently solicited. "Maybe if Mrs. Latimer offers a reward for the man who killed her husband and I get it, I'll look you up for one of those little bungalows of yours down on the shore, Mr. Snell."

District Attorney Dysart was not in his office but Odell left with his clerk the message which would free both the Vorns and then stopped in at McMahan's Hotel for a quick bite. It was past noon and he did not want to go back to the hospitable Pettingills' just yet; there was much which he desired to accomplish before he encountered the sheriff again.

After a huge wedge of pie and a steaming cup of coffee he started once more up Main Street and struck off on the road leading toward Willow Brook. Opposite Mrs. Vail's little cottage he paused, however, and turned in at the almost aggressively new concrete bungalow of the young artist, Roscoe Farwell. A small bronze reproduction of a palette, with a maulstick thrust through the thumb aperture, served as a

knocker, and Odell sounded it twice before the door opened and Farwell appeared clad in a faded and paint-streaked smock.

For a moment he gazed with puzzled inquiry at his visitor and then smiling in sudden recognition held out a cordial hand.

"How are you, Sergeant! Come in and shut the door; it's beastly cold again, isn't it? Glad you looked me up."

He shivered and coughed as he spoke, and Odell obeyed him hastily, glancing with interest about the square entrance hall. It was draped with chintzes of a rich, subdued coloring, and Japanese prints were hung here and there against the delicately tinted walls.

"Come into the studio," his host urged. "The furnace is on strike again, but I've got a roaring wood fire going on the hearth and it's more habitable there. I've about made up my mind to shut up this place or rent it in the spring and go up into the mountains; Doc Hale says my throat is in bad shape."

As he talked he led the way into a huge, bare room with canvases stacked everywhere and an easel set up beneath the cold light which streamed down from the glass roof. A half finished sketch stood upon it of low, rolling, snow-covered hills with broad purple shadows drawn across them with a bold brush and a bit of gray marshland in the foreground.

"I don't pretend to know anything about art, Mr. Farwell, but this looks mighty realistic to me." Odell paused before it. "It almost seems as though I'd seen that place myself!"

"Perhaps you have," Farwell responded laughingly. "It's the edge of the marsh down by Chris Vorn's duck farm.—I'm sick of looking at the thing myself; I guess I've been working at it too steadily. Come over by the fire and have a cigarette."

Logs were blazing high in the wide fireplace and it was evident that an effort had been made to give an atmosphere of cosiness and cheer to that corner of the studio. A low table and two or three deep leather armchairs were drawn up on the rug before the hearth, and bookcases were placed on each side of the mantel upon which stood a quaint old clock and two brass candlesticks. Propped against one of the latter was the photograph of a handsome woman with full lips, dark hair and slumbrous eyes beneath straight, thin, strongly marked brows.

Odell's eyes were fixed upon it as he dropped into one of the chairs, and his host followed his gaze and remarked with pride:

"That's my sister; I think I mentioned her to you. We don't look much alike now, do we, since my face has been practically reconstructed?"

"No, but she is a mighty fine-looking young woman," Odell replied.

"Funny thing she never married, isn't it?" Farwell mused. "Always had any number of admirers hanging around, but she never seemed to care particularly for anyone. However, let's hear about the Latimer case. Are you making any progress that you can disclose unofficially? Of course I know all about that Vorn business yesterday and how wonderfully you cleared

it up, Sergeant, but that's old stuff now. Got any clue to the real murderer?"

Odell laughed frankly.

"You had me right yesterday, Mr. Farwell. I'm trying to give the impression around town that I'm a regular boob, and maybe I am, at that, but orders have come down here detailing me to the case at the request of one of the county officials and I'm going to do my level best to find out the truth." He leaned nearer his host. "I've been thinking about those questions you told me you were asking yourself and I've come to the conclusion that if I can find the answers to them I'll be very near to the solution of the problem."

"I don't see any other logical explanation, at least on the evidence that has been given out." Farwell gazed thoughtfully into the fire. "There may be a dark horse in the race, of course, but it looks to me as though there were only one even bet. I saw the sheriff this morning trailing down from Willow Brook in the wake of the undertaker's wagon and the limousine; that was all the funeral procession Latimer had, poor devil, except the omnipresent reporters and camera men. You weren't there?"

"No. I ran into town again to report." Odell spoke carelessly, but every word was studied. "It was mighty clever of you, Mr. Farwell, to dope that out about the possibility of some appointment down by the pond on Tuesday night that Latimer interrupted; but did you only deduce it from the torn coat, the fact that the butler couldn't get any response from Mrs. Latimer's room when the 'phone call came and that meet-

ing Latimer had with some man at the station which seemed to make him change his mind so suddenly? The hicks around here don't see beyond the length of their own noses, but you've got the point of view of a man of the world, and I was wondering if perhaps you hadn't seen something more than you cared to tell me yesterday. I may say in confidence that I suggested your theory to the sheriff, without letting him know where the idea originated, of course, and he's dropped every other lead to work exclusively on it."

"Really?" A slight flush had mounted in Farwell's thin face at the compliment, but he added hastily: "Surely he or the district attorney must have had some suspicion, from the evidence alone of that torn piece of moleskin which you found!"

"But Mrs. Latimer could have sworn that she had worn the coat while walking down by the pond at some time previous to the murder, and that maid of hers, Maggie Ruggles, would take any oath to back her up. You know yourself how she sticks to it that Mrs. Latimer was in bed asleep when that 'phone call came for her."

"Maggie Ruggles!" Farwell repeated. "That sounds like an old New England name, doesn't it?"

"It is. She came from Mrs. Latimer's birthplace, Fairfield Harbor, with her. You know New England, then?"

"Yes, I've toured up along the coast more than once, sketching, you know, with some painter friends of mine. Cape Cod was a mine of treasure for the artist, but it's been a bit overdone now." Farwell's

tone was absent, but he roused himself with a laugh. "I've heard of any number of Rugglesses along there, but I've never been to the place you mention.—I suppose you thought it was pretty fresh of me to way-lay you as I did yesterday, but the truth is I've been bored to death, and although it seems caddish to say it this mystery has been a godsend to me. However, I'm sorry I can't help you out any; I really haven't seen or heard anything that I haven't told you. I merely followed out a train of reasoning from the evidence at hand for my own diversion."

Odell rose.

"You have helped me, Mr. Farwell, by putting me on a track that may prove to be the right one. I don't suppose you happened to see who was in the limousine that followed the undertaker's wagon this morning, did you?"

"I was curious, naturally, but I didn't think it would be the decent thing to do to stare openly. I stood behind the curtains of the window in the entrance hall and the road was so bad that the machines were going slowly enough for me to get a good look in the window of the limousine. There were two women inside heavily muffled and one of them in deep mourning whom I took to be Mrs. Latimer, though I couldn't see her face. An elderly man in a clerical hat was with them, and that was all. I had seen him driving up toward Willow Brook in the Latimer limousine an hour before, and I fancy he was the minister who conducted whatever services there were. Just as they drove past the bungalow he reached out and pulled down the shade, to keep out the gaze of the villagers I suppose. All this

was very early, just around eight o'clock, and the car came back in a few minutes going like the devil."

"Then Mrs. Latimer hasn't returned yet?" Odell was buttoning his overcoat as he spoke.

"I think so," Farwell replied. "At least, the machine went down toward the station about an hour and a half ago and came back, but the shades were drawn both ways. You'll think me a regular old woman to be spying like that, but I've already confessed my curiosity. I would like to get a good look at Mrs. Latimer; so far, I've only caught glimpses."

"You may have an opportunity before very long," Odell remarked significantly. "I'm glad to have had this little talk with you, Mr. Farwell. If anything more occurs to you that might help, you'll let me know, won't you? I'm going right up now and see if I can have an interview with Mrs. Latimer."

"Good luck to you, Sergeant." Farwell shook hands cordially. "Drop in again whenever you can; I'll be glad to see you."

Taking leave of his host, Odell picked his way along the road leading to Willow Brook, for the sidewalks were still impassable. Although the artist had been able to give him no direct information, his face was more than usually furrowed with thought; and as his mind traveled swiftly back over the incidents of the previous day his conversation with his own chief at Headquarters returned to him. The latter had said that if he continued to monkey with the Latimer case he could not help but play politics. Unconsciously the detective's shoulders straightened and his lips set

in a firm line. He'd show them all whether he could or not!

Pettingill was an old friend, but if he acted too hastily he must take the consequences. Odell was out to find the murderer of Gilbert Latimer if it were humanly possible, no matter what official heads fell into the basket.

Instead of entering the gates of Willow Brook and proceeding up the driveway or one of the paths, Odell cleared the ditch by the side of the road at one leap and squeezed through the hedge not far from the spot whence he had approached the body on the morning the murder was discovered. The ice on the surface of the pond had thawed to a mere film and the frozen hummocks of snow which had covered the ground were flattened into the gray slush that was hardening again in a return of the cold spell.

The detective glanced toward the house, but the shades of all the windows visible from where he stood were discreetly lowered and no one was in sight. From the place in the hedge where Jimmie Vail had first approached the scene on that memorable Wednesday, to the approximate spot where the body had lain, and beyond to the clump of holly trees Odell coursed back and forth like a hound who had momentarily lost the scent, his keen eyes covering every inch of the sodden, frost-coated earth at his feet; but nothing rewarded his scrutiny, and he widened the field of his search to the willows which bordered the pond.

There, with an ejaculation of satisfaction, he swooped down at last upon a tiny, limp object which he held between thumb and forefinger and regarded

closely and exultantly before he slipped it into his waistcoat pocket.

Fastening his coat once more, he turned his back upon the smooth stretch of filmed water glistening in the early afternoon sunlight and struck out for the driveway leading to the house.

He had mounted the steps of the veranda and raised his hand to the knocker when to his unbounded amazement the door was opened from within and the thin, tanned face of Starr Agnew, quivering with excitement appeared in the aperture.

"We thought you'd never come, Sergeant!" he exclaimed. "Both Mr. Crewe and Mr. Lefferts have been waiting here since yesterday, for we didn't know when you would show up, and I came out with Mrs. Latimer and my sister after the interment. Hang the Vorns! Why didn't you come straight here from Headquarters?"

"Eh?" gasped the astonished detective. "I don't believe I understand this, Mr. Agnew. You were expecting me, you say?"

"Come in!" The other grasped his arm and drew him into the hall, slamming the front door behind him. "You don't have to keep up any bluff with us, you know! You got the office from your chief, didn't you?"

For a moment Odell's mind was a chaos, and then as comprehension slowly dawned he smiled. So that was what the chief had meant! No wonder he had howled when Odell voiced his indignant protest against pandering to the political aspirations of the sheriff and the district attorney by trying to make out a case with Mrs. Latimer as the culprit! The district at-

torney had asked for Odell's services in an official capacity to prove Mrs. Latimer's guilt, but it was evident that somebody else had been bidding for them also to prove her innocence. Who could that somebody else be?

"I did, Mr. Agnew!" Odell chuckled, and then his face grew grave. "I suppose you know, however, the conditions under which I accepted the case? I am to be free to conduct this investigation in any manner that I see fit, with orders from no one."

"We understand all that, and if I seemed a trifle impatient just now you must take into consideration the severe mental strain under which we are all laboring. Not the least of our troubles is that we have been unable to convince Mrs. Latimer of the precariousness of her position. She is dazed with the suddenness of the whole horrible affair and cannot seem to collect herself.—But come into the library; Lefferts and Crewe are there waiting for you since you first came along the road. What were you doing there by the pond?"

"Looking for something, Mr. Agnew. Before we sit in any conference, let us understand each other. I must have absolute frankness, the whole truth. I may not be able to prevent Mrs. Latimer's arrest, I may not even be able to produce the necessary evidence to clear her from suspicion before she is actually brought to trial. I am afraid the sheriff has come into possession of stronger circumstantial evidence than you even dream now. You can see how vital it is that I have all the facts, that there be no equivocations or evasions."

"Of course!" Agnew assented nervously. "That goes without saying. My sister and I are the only close friends Mrs. Latimer has in the world, and I shouldn't have used all the influence I have to get you assigned to this case if we meant to hinder your efforts, Sergeant."

Odell smiled again to himself as he followed the other across the wide hall to the library. So it was Agnew himself who was bidding against the district attorney for his services! And neither of them knew that he was impelled to accept the case by still a third and higher influence than either could wield: the determination to see that justice was done and the real murderer of Latimer discovered.

When Starr Agnew opened the library door Mr. Crewe was pacing up and down before the hearth swinging his tortoise-rimmed glasses by their broad black ribbon; while seated behind the writing-table with a mass of papers in front of him was the elderly, imposing-looking man with snow-white hair who had led Mrs. Latimer away after she had testified at the inquest, and whom Odell had rightly concluded to be Benjamin Lefferts, the senior member of the law firm.

He acknowledged the introduction with dignified, old-fashioned courtesy and then thrust aside his papers.

"We were fortunate in that your superior assigned you to this case, Sergeant Odell. I have been informed that the district attorney was prevailed upon to have you temporarily attached to his staff as a special officer. You have followed this case from its inception, and I need not dilate upon the position in which our

client, Mrs. Latimer, may presently be placed. In the event of her being accused of the murder of her husband we should as a matter of course defend her, although we do not as a rule take criminal cases. You may consider it strange, therefore, that we have called you, a potential witness for the prosecution, to our aid since it was you who brought forward the first bit of circumstantial evidence, or clue, against our client in the shape of that strip of fur torn from her coat; but we have carefully looked up your record and we believe that we know the man with whom we are dealing."

Odell flushed slightly.

"I did not produce that possible clue, Mr. Lefferts, until it became my absolute duty to do so. I would be placed in a decidedly equivocal position myself in this case if it were not for one thing. Leaving personal consideration aside—my old friendship for the sheriff and place as a guest in his household—I have as you say been officially loaned to the district attorney for this investigation, and unofficially assigned to it in the interests of your client. When I reported at Headquarters yesterday, four days before my original leave expired, it was with the purpose, as my chief can tell, of obtaining a month's extension and carrying on a further investigation of this affair strictly in a private capacity."

"Indeed!" Mr. Lefferts sat back in his chair while Crewe turned and faced them. "May I ask why, Sergeant Odell?"

"I told my chief that it was because I had become interested in the problem and wanted to try to solve

it in sheer love of the game, but that was not the whole truth," Odell replied. "I had already become convinced of the innocence of the Vorns, although I could not then prove it, but I also believed in the innocence of another person and I saw the trend of events."

"What person?" Agnew had started forward, but a quick glance from the elderly attorney restrained him.

"That is the one thing which renders my present position unequivocal." Odell smiled. "I may perhaps be ruining the chances of my friend the sheriff for reelection, but I can work honestly for the district attorney and with wholehearted interest for you. You see, I do not and never for one moment have believed that Mrs. Latimer killed her husband."

"Thank God!" Agnew grasped his hand, while Lef-ferts turned to his partner and nodded as though in triumph. "And you were willing to sail in on your own, in a private capacity, and prove it? That was splendid of you!"

"I merely mentioned that because my chief can corroborate it," Odell observed. Then he turned again to Mr. Lefferts and added gravely: "Do not overrate my ability or underestimate the power of the district attorney's office in a place like this, sir. Should the worst happen and Mrs. Latimer be held for trial, the prosecution would have an enormous advantage to start in the unconscious influence it would exercise over the minds of the purely local jury. To be frank, Mr. Latimer had not made himself popular out here, but Mrs. Latimer is practically unknown; she is an outsider, as are we all, and it has been my experience that

the smaller the community the more clannish are its inhabitants. We must do more than merely attempt to disprove the evidence against Mrs. Latimer; we must find the murderer of her husband."

Lefferts nodded again in deep satisfaction.

"I told you I believed that we knew the man with whom we were dealing," he said. "You will proceed with the investigation in your own way, Sergeant Odell. The case is in your hands."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE NAME OF THE LAW

AT A GESTURE from the senior partner Odell seated himself, while Crewe stood eying him thoughtfully from the hearthrug and Agnew strode for a moment to the window.

"I don't propose to waste any time, then, gentlemen," Odell remarked. "Mr. Agnew, when the sheriff questioned you yesterday concerning your own movements on the night of the murder you refused to give an account of them. You can do so, I suppose, if it becomes absolutely necessary? I mean, you can prove by witnesses that between five o'clock on Tuesday afternoon when you left your own club in town, the Commonwealth, in your roadster until nearly midnight when you drove into your garage you were nowhere in the vicinity of Sunnymead?"

"Good Lord!" Agnew had wheeled and was staring at him in amazement. "They don't think that I had anything to do with it, do they? I did not drive more than twenty miles from town on Tuesday evening, but I'm afraid I could not prove an alibi for every minute of the time."

"For the hours, then, between eight and eleven?" Odell urged.

The thin, tanned face before him darkened and the

nostrils quivered for an instant like those of a high-spirited thoroughbred, but Agnew replied quietly enough:

"No, Sergeant. If I told the truth upon the witness stand about what I did during that time and refused to give explanation, I should not be believed under oath. And I cannot explain, even to you, although I will tell you just what my movements were, if you like."

"Please do so." Odell spoke with deep gravity.

"I left the club in an ugly mood. I had had no words with anyone, but I was low in my mind over a private matter, and in spite of the intense cold I thought that a run in the open air would chase away the little blue devils," Agnew began. "I drove out and stopped up the road at a little inn I knew of for dinner, expecting to find it practically deserted as it usually is in winter; but they had installed one of those cursed jazz bands and the place was packed, though not with the sort of people I knew. My only chance of establishing my presence there, I am afraid, would be by the waiter's testimony, and I doubt that he would recall me in that mob, for he seemed to be taking a dozen orders at once. I am sure I shouldn't know him if I saw him again. I was disgusted with the place and the service and ate merely a bite before starting to drive back to the city once more."

"What was the name of the inn?" asked Odell.

"It is called 'At the Sign of the Lark,' and there is a metal imitation of an English lark's cage hanging outside," replied Agnew. "I should say it was about twenty miles above the city limits. It was about eight

o'clock when I drove down Riverside Drive and stopped near an apartment-house entrance in the Nineties. I hung around there, out in the cold, for more than three hours and then drove back to my garage. That's all I can tell you, Sergeant, yet it is the exact truth. Could you expect any jury who thought me sane to believe it?"

"Yes," Odell responded promptly. "You were waiting for someone, of course. You may have had an appointment or have merely been watching to intercept them or see them go in or out of one of the buildings on that block. You waited in vain, obviously; but isn't there some way you could prove your presence there? Didn't you see anyone who might have recognized or would recall you? The officer on the beat—?"

Agnew shook his head, while the two lawyers gazed at him in surprise and disapproval.

"People passed in and out of the apartment house during the evening, but I did not know any of them and I took care that they didn't see me," he answered doggedly. "It was too cold for pedestrians to be about, and I don't believe half a dozen people, all told, passed while I hung around there. I didn't notice any policeman."

"Very well." Odell changed the subject abruptly. "Mr. Agnew have you ever quarreled with Mr. Latimer?"

The other started at the question and then his mobile lips set in a firm line.

"Yes, on two or three occasions."

"When were these occasions?"

"The first was last spring sometime in May, I think. The second was in November, and the third and final one last Saturday night."

Odell did not allow a muscle of his face to change, but he was conscious of an inward surge of mounting excitement.

"Mr. Agnew, I have warned you that I cannot help you unless you give me unreserved frankness. What was the subject of those quarrels between you?"

"Latimer's course of conduct." The reply came with obvious reluctance from his lips. "The first time he was drunk and grossly insulted a lady. In November I remonstrated with him about moving out here and condemning Mrs. Latimer to solitude and isolation when the season was just getting into swing. The first occasion was in my own home, the apartment which my sister and I have together in town, the second in his office and the third last Saturday night near the coat-checking desk at the Palais du Plaisir, the new supper review place."

He paused, but Odell persisted.

"Did you accompany him there?"

"No. We met by accident."

"Was Mr. Latimer alone?"

Starr Agnew turned in sudden appeal to Lefferts.

"Look here, is it necessary to rake up all this? It has absolutely nothing to do with the murder—"

"I'm afraid it is necessary, my boy," the elderly lawyer responded gravely. "Sergeant Odell must know the truth. He has learned already about our late client's appropriation of the invention which belonged

to another, a matter of which I need scarcely assure you, Sergeant, we were entirely in ignorance."

He turned to the detective, who nodded.

"I was aware of that, naturally, Mr. Lefferts. I can comprehend Mr. Agnew's reluctance to speak disparagingly of the man who is dead, but perhaps it will help if I say that I have estimated the character of your late client from all points of view and that estimate is not a flattering one," Odell declared firmly. "We must have no evasions. I know that Mr. Latimer abused his wife, even to the extent of resorting to physical violence; that the marriage was a bitter failure. Mrs. Latimer is proud, but I have seen the bruises upon her wrists, and servants talk, you know. Mr. Agnew, was the lady whom Mr. Latimer insulted on the occasion of your first quarrel with him, his wife?"

"Yes. I had introduced him into our home, and it was through my sister and me that Mrs. Latimer became acquainted with her future husband. I felt responsible and humiliated, for as I have told you Mrs. Latimer is quite alone in the world. That is why I took it upon myself to remonstrate with him about moving out here, for I knew that his object was to break up the friendship between his wife and my sister, and Mrs. Latimer clung to her as her one anchor in the wreck of her marriage; but he would have his way."

"I see. On this last occasion, in the Palais du Plaisir, who was with Mr. Latimer?"

Agnew glanced again toward Lefferts, who nodded inexorably, and the former spoke in a low tone.

"A woman. I did not know her."

"Did she resemble Mrs. Latimer in any way?"

"Heavens, no!" Agnew spoke as though the suggestion were a sacrilege. "She was tall and flashy and sensuous-looking, more the type one would have expected him to marry in the first place. It was none of my affair, of course, but the thought of poor little Mrs. Latimer alone down here in this cold, dreary house made me indignant; and when we met at the coat desk my greeting must have been distant, to say the least. He was in an ugly mood and made some sneering remark, and I told him quietly and explicitly just what I thought of him. I left him there, and that was the last time I saw him alive."

"Mr. Agnew, you mention three quarrels," Odell remarked deliberately. "Can you recall a fourth?"

The other shook his head and his steady gray eyes met those of his questioner in a puzzled fashion.

"No, Sergeant. I would remember, I am sure, had there been any more."

"Have you ever visited Mr. Latimer's factories, where the airplanes are constructed?"

"Yes, frequently, before our first quarrel. I have not been to either since."

"Are you sure?" Odell returned his gaze steadily. "Did you not go out to the plant at Latimer, New Jersey, about the middle of last September and interview Mr. Latimer in his private office there?"

"Certainly not. I did not return from the West until October."

"Are you sure of this, Mr. Agnew?" Odell leaned forward in his chair. "I do not doubt your word, but I ask you to think—think hard! I have several witnesses who can swear that a man answering to your general description called on Latimer out there and a quarrel ensued."

"That is not improbable," Agnew replied dryly. "However, I can prove by the three men who had been with me all summer looking over oil leases and who returned with me that we did not reach New York until the third of October."

"It is not improbable," conceded Odell. "But it is a peculiar coincidence in view of the fact that you say Mrs. Latimer is alone in the world and you and your sister are her closest friends. Do you know of any such man bearing a general resemblance to yourself who would be apt to feel it incumbent upon him to pay a special call on Latimer and threaten him if he did not do the right thing by his wife?"

"I do not!" Agnew exclaimed. The deep red mounted in his face once more as he turned to the two lawyers and demanded: "Do you?"

Crewe shook his head, and Lefferts replied:

"No; this is most interesting and may prove an important point. Can you tell us more about this interesting interview, Sergeant?"

"Not now, Mr. Lefferts; I haven't time. I've interviewed the cook here and the housemaid and Maggie Ruggles. I understand they were all the female servants employed here up to a few days ago. Have any been added to the household since?"

"Only my sister's personal maid, Jeannette." It

was Starr Agnew who responded quickly. "Why do you ask, Sergeant?"

"I'm sorry that I cannot answer you now, and I will ask all of you to keep the fact that I ask that question in strict confidence." Odell paused and then asked: "I suppose Mrs. Latimer is almost prostrated, but would it be possible for me to see her for a few minutes? Time is everything with us now."

"Shall I ask my sister? She is with her now." Agnew rose eagerly and at a nod from Lefferts left the room.

When the door had closed behind him Crewe cleared his throat and asked in a cautious tone:

"Is anyone else in possession of the knowledge which you have revealed to us, Sergeant?"

"About the visitor at the factory?" Odell countered. "No, Mr. Crewe, I have not mentioned it to anyone."

"We have no time to mince matters," Lefferts broke in with a touch of asperity. "What my associate really means, Sergeant Odell, is whether the sheriff or the district attorney have suspected any possible motive for the murder of Mr. Latimer by his wife other than that his ill-treatment and neglect had driven her to desperation."

"I do not know what possible motive there could be for Mrs. Latimer to want her husband out of the way; but when a young and pretty woman is unhappy in her married life and another man is patently in love with her there are apt to be some very sinister suspicions if her husband is found dead and circumstantial evidence points to her," Odell replied slowly,

weighing each word. "I have heard it hinted by those who are not connected in any way with the official investigation that Mr. Latimer might have been apprised by the man with whom he was seen talking at the station of a clandestine meeting by the pond here, and returned to meet his death. It was also suggested that he might have come back for something he had forgotten, meaning to take a later train perhaps, and had caught sight from the driveway of something down among the willows that ought to have been investigated."

"I feared it!" Lefferts shook his head again as Crewe turned with a shocked exclamation and recommenced his nervous pacing before the hearth. "At least, although we cannot judge of the strength of the circumstantial evidence which has been piled up against our client, we know where we stand and what we've got to fight! Sergeant Odell, the guilty man *must* be found!"

He and the detective rose as a soft, silken rustle came to their ears from the hall, and Mrs. Latimer entered leaning upon Agnew's arm and followed by a tall, slender woman whose steady gray eyes and delicate, highly-bred face identified her even before her brother's introduction.

Mrs. Latimer was pallid, and deep purple shadows had settled beneath her soft blue eyes, but she smiled faintly as she extended a small hand to Odell. He could feel it burning feverishly within his clasp.

"Mr. Agnew tells me that you wish to see me, Sergeant Odell." She spoke in the low, clear tones he remembered from their first interview. "He says that

you have come here to help me. You are very kind, but I can tell you nothing more than I have already, and all I need is rest."

"It is to try to keep you from having that rest disturbed that I am here, Mrs. Latimer," Odell replied gravely. "I know that you had nothing to do with the death of your husband, but others in authority do not agree with me, and your position is a very serious one at this moment. If you will only tell me the truth about that night, why you left the house after your husband had departed for the station and, wearing your moleskin coat, wandered down to the pond, I may be able to save you much suffering."

"But I did not leave the house that night." A tiny, stubborn line appeared between her finely-drawn brows, and she turned appealingly to the younger woman. "Doris, you believe me, don't you, even if no one else does?"

"Of course, Margery dear," Doris Agnew replied soothingly, but she averted her face as she spoke. "Sit down here and lean back against the cushions."

"I don't know how that piece of fur from my coat came to be where you found it, Sergeant Odell," Mrs. Latimer continued as she settled herself in her chair. "It cannot be that just because of it anyone would think I—I had done that horrible thing! No one could be so stupid! Why, Mr. Lefferts has offered a reward—"

"You have offered it, Mrs. Latimer," interrupted the elderly lawyer in the patient tone of one coaching a dull but docile pupil. "Do not forget that. You have offered a reward of ten thousand dollars for the ap-

prehension of your husband's murderer and proof that will convict him of the crime."

Mrs. Latimer's delicate features quivered slightly, but she turned to the detective and nodded.

"You see? Why would I offer a reward if I were myself guilty?"

"Mrs. Latimer, won't you trust me?" Odell pleaded, ignoring her futile question. "Won't you tell me what you thought you saw down by the pond that night?"

As she shrank back with a little sobbing gasp the knocker upon the front door clanged resoundingly through the house, and all of them unconsciously stiffened as though awaiting a blow. They heard the soft pad of Bangs' feet along the hall, the opening and closing of a door, and then heavy footsteps approached.

"Come in." Benjamin Lefferts' voice rang out aggressively in response to a knock, and he took two quick strides over to his client's chair.

The door opened slowly and Sheriff Pettingill appeared upon the threshold. A portentous gravity rose upon him, and as his eyes swept the little group and encountered Odell he squared his shoulders defiantly; yet his voice was unusually gentle as he advanced and addressed Mrs. Latimer.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but I've got a warrant here from the magistrate for your arrest."

"On what charge?" demanded Lefferts, but Odell scarcely heard him. He was watching Mrs. Latimer, and he fancied for a moment that a strange, enigmatic smile flitted across her pale face.

"For the murder of Gilbert Latimer!" the sheriff responded.

All eyes had turned now to the small figure, which seemed to gather strength as she rose from her chair and spoke in a clear, ringing tone from which all trace of its former querulous helplessness had fled.

"I am ready, Sheriff, to go with you."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DOUBLE TRAIL

AT EIGHT o'clock that evening Lefferts, his partner and Starr Agnew were gathered together in the private sitting-room which McMahan's hotel boasted, waiting with ill-concealed impatience for the appearance of Barry Odell.

"He's late," announced Crewe from the depths of the chair into which he had flung himself. "What do you suppose the fellow is doing? You don't think he is double-crossing us? You're sure he is trustworthy, Ben?"

It was perhaps the twentieth time that he had voiced those questions, but Lefferts replied with stoic calm:

"I wish I were as sure that our friend here would obey instructions."

Agnew, his face dark with suffering, turned savagely upon him.

"It's all very well for you to talk, but you lawyers aren't human sometimes! Do you realize that that delicate, gently reared little woman, after a year of suffering and a week of stark horror, is in jail? You ask me to run away, to go back to town and leave her here to face a trial for her life for a crime which she did not commit?"

"I ask you not to make this case harder for us to fight than it's going to be," Lefferts retorted with sudden sternness. "You are thinking only of your own feelings, Agnew; you want to spare yourself all you can, and you won't realize that every hour of your presence here before the trial is prejudicing public opinion more strongly against her. I haven't spoken plainly before, but do you know what people are saying, what the district attorney is building his case upon? That Mrs. Latimer killed her husband not because of his neglect or brutality, but because she wanted to marry another man!"

"Great heavens!" Agnew paused aghast. "What a cursed outrage! I—I'm beginning to understand! I'll take that train with you and Odell tonight."

"I shall be here," announced Crewe in pompous consolation. "As soon as Ben has given the detective all the information in his power about Mr. Latimer's past he will return, and I think our client's interests may safely be left in our hands."

"I'm banking on Odell," remarked Lefferts hastily as he saw signs of a renewed storm in Agnew's eyes. "I know the brilliant record he has made for himself in his few years' connection with the Department in New York, and if anybody can discover the murderer of Gilbert Latimer he will! Besides, you know, Agnew, that your sister will be here at the hotel, and she will spend every moment with Mrs. Latimer that the authorities will permit. With Maggie Ruggles and Henry Eaves in charge up at Willow Brook and all the rest of the servants held as material witnesses, no harm can come to any of her effects. The grand jury meets in

three weeks. The time will be all too short in which to prepare our case, but I'll keep in constant touch with you."

"Thanks," Agnew said simply.

A knock upon the door prevented any further remark from him, and Odell entered carrying his suitcase.

"I'm a little late, but I've had a lot to do," he apologized. "In the first place, I interviewed the Willow Brook servants and your sister's maid, Mr. Agnew, and I'll have to ask you a question that may sound confoundedly impertinent; but please remember that we are all working with only one purpose in view—to free Mrs. Latimer. Did you ever write any letters to her which might—well, which might be misconstrued?"

Agnew flushed and then turned white to the lips.

"Once, a long while ago," he stammered. "It was just a foolish letter written in a moment of—er—disappointment, but it could be used with damning effect now. You don't mean that she kept it?"

"She did until yesterday," Odell responded briefly. "Then your sister's maid found it and sold it to the sheriff for a hundred dollars."

"Jeannette did that!" Agnew cried. He turned helplessly to Lefferts. "That—that motive you mentioned awhile ago, sir! They have enough circumstantial evidence now to play it up strong before any jury!"

"Then you'd better get busy and try to think up every sentence it contained and tell them to Mr. Lefferts, so that he'll know how to fight it," advised Odell coolly. "It doesn't interest me; I want to get the man

who killed Latimer, and I know you didn't, Mr. Agnew. You were too busy watching that apartment house up on the Drive to see if your man would appear, and he couldn't because he was lying dead out by the pond a couple of miles away from here."

"How did you know?" Agnew stared

"I'm not making any play to the gallery!" Odell laughed. "You practically told me so yourself this afternoon. I don't believe you were the only one to be disappointed that evening; the lady from the Palais du Plaisir must have waited longer than you inside that apartment house! How long have you known about that woman, Mr. Agnew?"

"I've been hearing rumors ever since Latimer induced his wife to move out here," the young man replied. "I can't say I believed them, though, for I didn't think that even he could be such a rotter until I saw him going into the Palais du Plaisir with her on Saturday night. I followed and got the next table, and from the chance word or two that I overheard he seemed to be in a temper and she was egging him on to fury. There wasn't any scene, though, and after I met him at the coat-checking desk and told him what I thought of him I decided I'd wait outside and follow in another taxi, if they took one, to find out where the woman lived. I hadn't any plan in my head, but just a vague determination to put a stop somehow to the affair before it reached Mrs. Latimer's ears and added the last drop to her cup of misery. Latimer left the woman at that apartment house, the 'Vanderlyn,' and the last thing I had heard her say to him as they were getting out of the taxi before the door

was something about Tuesday night; so I concluded it was to be the date of their next meeting."

"The 'Vanderlyn,' eh?" Odell made a mental note of the name. "Those rumors you had heard didn't by any chance include the lady's name, did they, or anything of her history?"

"No. She isn't known at all, but people have seen her about now and again with Latimer."

"How long has Mr. Latimer been a client of yours?" Odell turned to Lefferts.

"Five years," the latter responded. "He was just founding his airplane company then, and we incorporated it for him. We soon found out that he was a man of violent temper and few scruples as far as business was concerned, but he seemed anxious to keep within the strict letter of the law, and we were satisfied. Have you seen Mrs. Latimer?"

"Yes. Dr. Hale had been called in to give her something to quiet her. She must be sleeping by now." Odell carefully modulated his voice and then as quickly raised it to his normal tone. "I saw the district attorney and the sheriff, too. They were not any too well pleased with the attitude I have taken, but I put it to them straight that they had asked for my help in finding the murderer of Gilbert Latimer and I meant to give it to them. The D. A. hinted that if I didn't care to work under his orders I could go back to Headquarters, but I think he realizes it is a little too late for that now. There's one thing sure; neither of them will take me into their confidence in the future, but they both seem certain that they have a strong case."

"Three weeks is a very short period for you to find

out who really killed Latimer and obtain proof enough against this person to have Mrs. Latimer's trial thrown out of court," Crewe remarked.

"Well, I'm not working entirely in the dark." Odell laughed again. "The prosecution have their clue in that torn piece of fur from Mrs. Latimer's coat, but I have evidence almost as strong in rebuttal; and the odd thing is that it has been lying there all this time at the scene of the crime. I only picked it up this afternoon, but it is as distinctive, in its way, in pointing to the identity of the person who dropped it there as the bit of moleskin. However, I haven't a shred of evidence yet that would suggest any possible motive for the murder, and in order to obtain that it will be necessary for me to dig into the pasts of more than one individual. Do you know anything about Mr. Latimer prior to your meeting in England in nineteen-sixteen, Mr. Agnew?"

"No. He was presented to me by some member of a flying club over there, and as I told you he was selling planes to the British government," Agnew replied. "He was keeping himself pretty well in hand then and watching his step, and I rather liked him. He was born in England, I believe, but he must have traveled extensively in this country, for he knew a lot about the mining and oil properties all over the West as well as manufacturing conditions. He was a fascinating talker when he chose, but he really told very little about himself."

"It seems odd that you did not attempt to find out more about him personally when you brought him to your home," Lefferts said slowly.

Starr Agnew shrugged.

"In the war you learned to take people rather at their face value; but don't think I haven't blamed myself a thousand times since!" he exclaimed. "I feel as though I were personally to blame for this whole terrible thing which has fallen upon Mrs. Latimer's shoulders, but I never dreamed that she would — would marry him! I knew nothing about it until it was all over. It was then that I wrote her that letter which you say is now in the hands of the sheriff, for I admit that I was hard hit; but the subject was never referred to again between us."

"You have not told us what your clue is, Sergeant Odell, and I infer that you do not care to do so until you have substantiated it," Crewe's precise accents broke in. "Can you not at least give us an idea where it leads?"

"To a double trail," responded Odell. "Don't worry about me if you do not hear from me often during the next three weeks, for I may have to travel far and fast; but I'll turn up all right at the trial, if not before, and unless I am very much mistaken I shall have my man with me!"

"You know who he is already?" exclaimed Crewe.

"I can prove nothing against him, and if I were to accuse him now I should only have a lunacy commission appointed for my pains." Odell smiled and glancing at the clock picked up his suitcase. "We have just time to make our train, gentlemen."

"But the man!" Crewe persisted.

"As for the man himself, I could almost reach out my hand and touch him now." Odell spoke carelessly and turned toward the door. "Gentlemen, our train!"

CHAPTER XX.

WHERE THE CLUE LED

ON THE following Monday morning Margery Fairfield Latimer was duly arraigned before the magistrate and held for the Grand Jury on the charge of murder in the first degree.

At the same hour Odell, in the New York offices of the Latimer Airplane Company, was deep in conversation with a gray-haired and timorous clerk whose manner showed plainly the effect of his late employer's dominant personality upon him during the years of his service.

"I'm sure, sir, I don't know whether I ought to talk or not without the permission of the attorneys even though you do come from Mrs. Latimer," he was saying hesitatingly. "The directors of the company, too—"

"The financial affairs of the company do not interest me, but the private ones of the late Mr. Latimer most certainly do," Odell retorted firmly. "You and I both know that there is nothing unusual in his having banked for his own purposes at some other institution than that in which the company's funds were maintained, using his own money. I simply wish to know how many such accounts he kept up, and you must be in a position to tell me."

The elderly bookkeeper lowered his head in thought for a moment and then replied:

"His principal account was with the Mammoth Trust, sir, and it was only by accident that I learned he had another. The checkbook dropped out of his pocket here in this very office one day last autumn, and as I picked it up and handed it to him I couldn't help seeing the name stamped on it. I was surprised that a big man like Mr. Latimer would think of banking in such a humble institution, and I'm afraid my face must have shown it, for Mr. Latimer was—was plainly annoyed."

The deeply lined, sensitive face flushed, and Odell could imagine the insults which must have been heaped upon him; but he had no time for a display of sympathy.

"What was stamped on the checkbook?" he asked briefly.

The reply came so low that he could scarcely distinguish the words.

"The United Artisans' Bank."

A quarter of an hour later the detective presented himself at the shabby little building down near the Battery, and producing his credentials found that the paying teller had no such qualms as those shown by the old employee of the dead man.

"That Latimer account was the strangest we ever carried," the teller confided. "I began to think there was something phony about it myself, and I wasn't sorry when Latimer closed it out, although it was the biggest we ever handled."

"So he closed it out himself, did he?" Odell queried.
"When?"

The teller's face sobered.

"On the afternoon of the very day he was killed," he responded. "It only amounted then to about twelve thousand dollars, but we've carried as much as twenty thousand for him. It was against our rules, but he fixed it up through one of the directors."

"Were the checks all made out to the same person? I want the name or names, the dates and the amounts for which they called."

"They were made out to 'cash' only." The teller turned to his accounts. "The original deposit was twenty thousand and he drew half of it out a week later. That was on the thirtieth of last September. On the fifteenth of October he drew five thousand more and deposited fifteen. On the first of November and the first of December he drew five thousand each, and deposited ten more. That left his account again an even twenty thousand, but on the first of January five was drawn and on the twentieth, three thousand; that was the last until the account was closed out."

Odell left the bank, after a personal perusal of the books, with a slightly baffled feeling. He had hoped to find that the checks had been made out to some particular person, but in the main the interview had satisfied him. The regularity of the dates upon which the checks were drawn, the comparatively large amounts even for a man of Latimer's affluence and the caution displayed in the whole transaction pointed to one fact only, and Odell had already deduced that Latimer had been systematically blackmailed.

But by whom? The woman in the Vanderlyn apartment house on Riverside Drive? As he drove swiftly up there in a taxi the detective doubted the wisdom of the time lost in the move, for had the woman been the blackmailer she would most certainly have disappeared when the game ended so tragically, whether she were directly concerned in that ending or not.

Nor did he find that his conclusions had been at fault. Representing himself to the superintendent of the Vanderlyn as the doorman at the Palais du Plaisir, he announced that a lady who had taken a taxi from that restaurant on the previous Saturday night a week before with a gentleman had dropped a small brooch, and that after vainly waiting for her to offer a reward, he had obtained from the chauffeur the address to which the latter had driven and was there to restore the lost property if he could see the lady in person.

"You couldn't mistake her, sir," he said. "She was a tall, dark, splendid figure of a woman dressed in very bright colors, with heavy eyebrows like a man that almost met—"

The superintendent laughed shortly.

"You waited too long for that reward, my friend!" he exclaimed. "Mrs. Howell left suddenly last Wednesday afternoon, bag and baggage, and you'll have a hard job locating her, I'm thinking."

"Left!" Odell echoed with as much surprise and disappointment as he could throw into his voice. "Are you sure it must have been her? Did she have just a furnished apartment here, then, that she could get away as quick and easy as all that?"

"No. She sent all her furniture and household

goods to the Bigelow auction rooms and took just her trunks with her to the Grand Central Station. I wasn't around that day or she would never have slipped away like that, breaking her lease, but she told this hall-boy here that she had suddenly been called West."

"She sure did!" the boy affirmed. "I don't know how the word reached her, for she didn't get any mail or telegrams that morning, or even a 'phone, but maybe the gentleman who came to see her brought a message."

"Who was the gentleman?" Odell asked eagerly. "Perhaps he would know where I could write to her and send her the brooch!"

"He didn't give any name; just told the switchboard operator to announce to Mrs. Anita Howell that a gentleman had called to see her on important business, and she sent word back that he was to come right up," the boy explained. "I don't know who he was—he never came here before—but there was an older guy who used to take her out—"

"Shut up!" the superintendent ordered; then to Odell he added with an air of finality: "We can't help you any, but if you want to leave the brooch with me—?"

Odell declined and departed. His "hunch" had been right, and the woman who had been the murdered man's companion in the night life of the city had vanished at the first danger of notoriety of a more sinister sort.

At five o'clock he boarded the night boat for Boston, and noon of the following day found him in the sleepy little coast town of Fairfield Harbor.

There he made his way to the weatherbeaten old hotel across the way from the station, in the office of which, grouped in a semi-circle of chairs about a huge stove that glowed redly in welcome, he came upon a dozen of the natives who turned rheumatically to regard the stranger, their gray-bearded jaws wagging in unison.

"Can I get a room here for a day or so?" Odell asked of the spry little old man who had sidled forward behind the desk like a grizzled spider.

"Reckon ye kin." The proprietor eyed his guest's single small suitcase curiously. "Ye got the pick o' the whole huttel, but ye wouldn't hev had last week. What's your line?"

"Oh, I'm not a salesman." Odell smiled as he took the rusty pen and wrote "William Ordwell—New York City," in the register. A quick glance at the opposite page showed half a dozen names well known to him, those of star reporters and news photographers on the biggest metropolitan dailies. "I've come to try to get track of a relative of mine who moved away from here years ago."

"Seem's if nobuddy ever moves away, except it's out to the cemetery!"

The proprietor's shrill cackle at his own jest was broken by a wheezy voice from among the group at the stove:

"Mis' Fairfield did, Jabez!"

"She wasn't my relative, if you're speaking of the lady whose husband was murdered last week!" Odell smiled in friendly fashion at the circle of old men, and he proffered the bundle of newspapers he carried.

"Would you like to see the latest news? Or perhaps you already have the city papers?"

The avidity with which his offering was accepted replied to him even before his host spoke.

"We don't git to see 'em, but a passel of the fellers that writes pieces and takes pitchers fer 'em was here last week doin' a story about the old Fairfield house and the fam'ly history, an' they give us the news."

He led the way up the creaking stairs to a bare and chilly but scrupulously clean little room.

"Thar ye be! Git ye an ile stove in two shakes an' ye'll be real comfortable."

A babel of aged voices was suddenly raised in excitement from below, and there came the sound of the rapid opening and closing of the front door. Jabez departed hurriedly to learn the cause of the tumult, and Odell, left alone, smiled to himself.

He had gained his point and created a diversion from the curiosity naturally aroused by the arrival of a stranger in town. The next step would be to get acquainted in an unobtrusive fashion with its characteristically close-mouthed and suspicious denizens, and to this end he mingled freely during the following two days with the gossips who forgathered in the post office and hotel and general store, introducing himself with the boyish candor of demeanor that had gained him friends everywhere. When the excitement of the news which he had brought had somewhat subsided he broached the subject of his missing cousin, young Mrs. Howell, to whom a substantial legacy had been left.

This inspired respect but awakened no interest, and Odell was almost despairing of his quest when on Thursday he turned his back upon the village and struck off down to the bleak, rocky shore. There, in the lee of a jutting point, a cluster of fishermen's shacks were huddled, and there he came upon a bent old figure which seemed vainly trying to disengage a frozen net from the rocks to which its meshes had adhered.

"Good morning, sir! Let me help!" he exclaimed.

The bent figure straightened, and a pair of faded but still keen eyes gazed at him steadily for a moment.

"Be you the young city feller that Faithful heered tell of up to the store yesterday, who's come to learn about some folks named Howell?" the old fisherman asked at last.

"Yes, sir!" Odell responded eagerly. "Do you remember them? Mrs. Howell is my cousin and some money has been left to her, but we have not heard of her in ten years."

"Be you a play-actor too?" the other demanded.

"No. Unfortunately my young cousin ran away and went on the stage, and she married someone named Howell—"

"Another trouper in the same show!" interrupted the old man. "They was married up in the Methodist Church, an' though the minister's dead now you can find the records. They lived right in thet shack thar, without a penny to bless themselves with, until he ran away an' left her. Folks up to town turned up their noses at her because she was a stage woman, but Faithful—thet's my wife—she was kind to the young critter

an' used to bake things an' take over to her, an' when Mis' Howell left too an' went back to the city to jine another troupe she wrote Faithful two letters. Come in an' let Faithful show them to you. . . ."

Two days later Odell presented himself once more at Headquarters in New York. When he was closeted with his chief the latter demanded:

"What luck, Barry? The counsel for the defense in that Latimer case are getting nervous, and so is young Agnew. Have you honestly got a clue to the guilty man or were you kidding me last Monday?"

"I haven't got a clue to him, I've *got* him; but I'm no nearer proving anything yet than I was before, sir!" Odell retorted impatiently. "I'm looking for a woman, and it's going to take me all my time to find her. I want you to do just two things for me."

"What's the game?" His superior eyed with some apprehension the paper which the young detective sergeant had drawn from his pocket. "When you ask for help in that tone, Barry, it's dollars to doughnuts that you want me to butt in down there, and it's the District Attorney's job!"

"Oh, you can pull the wires all right, and this has nothing to do with the trial—exactly—sir." Odell grinned shamelessly. "In the first place, give me two good men to send out to Omaha. It's only a flyer, but it may be worth while. Then I want things arranged so that four men whom I have in mind are put in the panel for the Grand Jury when it sits for the trial—I'm not asking to have the jury itself fixed, only to have these men called for possible duty."

"Who are they?"

"One is a fat broker named Montgomery Robbins." Odell ran over the paper in his hands with a hasty glance. "Then there's a young artist named Roscoe Farwell, and Matthew Kingsley the naturalist, and the local real estate dealer, James Snell. You can manage that, can't you, Chief?"

"I suppose so!" grunted the other. "But you say you've 'got' your man. He's not under arrest; how can you be sure he won't slip through your fingers?—unless you have him locked up in some private jail of your own, of course!"

"That's not so far from the truth, Chief!" Odell laughed. "Sorry the counsel for the defense are getting nervous, but I've been busy since Monday in a little village far from Sunnymeade. The clue I had led to some potential results, but the biggest one of all I stumbled upon by chance in the local station."

He drew from beneath his coat a flat package about a foot long and unwrapped it, displaying an oddly shaped hook of steel half an inch thick with a seven-inch wooden handle.

"Do you know what this is?" he asked with naive pride. "It's a case hook, one of the diabolical things the baggage smashers in every little local station throughout the country use to spear your freight packages with and drag them off the trains if you are not looking. I stole this to compare with the one my friend Hiram Claggett must have at Sunnymeade."

"What for?" the chief demanded tersely but with suddenly reawakened interest.

"Because," replied Odell. "if his is as stout and heavy as this one, I will be willing to wager that it was the weapon used to kill Latimer!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LONG ARM

A FORTNIGHT later the Grand Jury convened, and the district attorney appeared before it, submitted his evidence and succeeded in having the prisoner held for trial.

Meanwhile alternate hope and despondency had reigned in the private sitting-room of McMahan's Hotel, where the defense had set up its headquarters. Foster Crewe, in spite of his pedantic speech and pomposity of manner, was shrewd and cunning, with a natural legal turn of mind as quick as a cat to pounce upon any point left unguarded by his opponent and make it his own. It was that quality which made him invaluable to the senior partner, and the two worked together in rare harmony.

In this case, however, there was a rift in the lute, a note of discord which, although it was not openly discussed as such between them, was acutely felt by both; and that discord was caused by Sergeant Barry Odell.

The last of the latter's cheerfully ambiguous notes was forwarded to Sunnymead from the city office of the firm on the day before the special panel for the jury was to be called; and that its contents had been faithfully noted by the senior clerk for Lefferts & Crewe was attested by the square, flat package which accompanied it.

"Thank the Lord!" Lefferts looked up from the note to ejaculate fervently. "He'll be here tomorrow!"

"Bringing his man with him?" Crewe raised his eyebrows as he unwrapped the package. "Doesn't say anything about that, does he? Do you realize, Ben, that we are going to trial with the weakest case for the defense on record? Now, what in the world do you suppose Odell wants with this?"

"This" was a large complimentary calendar sent out by the Argus Life Insurance Company two years before, with the usual lithograph above and monthly date-pad below.

"I don't know, but he seems to be aware of what he is about." Lefferts replied with a note of buoyancy that had been missing from his virile tones during the past few days. "Listen to this: 'Get calendar issued by Argus Life Co. nineteen-eighteen. Will be with you when special panel called, but may not get chance to speak to you. When prospective juror is turned over to you in each case if I raise my right hand to head accept him, if left, reject; certain men vital on jury if possible.'"

"Is that all?" Crewe leaned forward in his chair. "Ben, this is the first time in our association that I have suggested such a thing, but hadn't we better call in Brummell?"

"Brummell!" The senior partner fairly thundered the name. "That purveyor of fake evidence and bribed witnesses? No, by heavens! If Odell fails us—though I don't believe for an instant that he will, remember!—we'll rest our case on the evidence we

have and thank God that it is at least on the level!"

"Is it?" Crewe had lowered his voice significantly. "Maggie Ruggles is loyal, but was our client really in bed and asleep when Miss Agnew telephoned to her?"

"She herself has assured us that she was and her maid has corroborated her." Lefferts spoke with a note of warning in his tones. "If we go to court with a doubt of our client's truthfulness in our own minds, how can we hope to impress a jury? We must believe her, Foster, and we must make them believe her; that is the keystone upon which our structure will stand or fall."

They waited for a full hour the next morning before court opened for the coming of their special investigator, but Odell failed to put in an appearance; and in a silence that was more significant than words they made their way through the densely packed throng in the square to the old court house.

Staid Sunnymeade had never known such excitement since the days when the first settlers put up their stockade to protect them against the marauding Shinnecoeks. Every spare room in the county seat was taken at a price hitherto unheard of, and lunch wagons and booths lined every street in the vicinity of the square. If Margery Latimer were to be sacrificed to make a Sunnymeade holiday, it would at least be a memorable one.

As they took their places at the table in the courtroom reserved for the counsel for the defense, Crewe drew his breath sharply, and his companion, following his gaze, beheld Odell seated calmly among the

county officials; nor did he take any notice of their presence beyond the briefest of nods.

There was no time for comment, for Judge Mapleton made his entrance almost immediately and took his place on the bench, and the celebrated and much-heralded trial was on.

While the clerk of the court called the roll and monotonously directed that those who desired exemption should line up at the right before the judge, both parties studied the heterogeneous collection of prospective jurors closely. Farmers and tradesmen, village loafers and well-groomed commuters jostled each other indiscriminately in their efforts to reach the line on the right, though now and then a shopkeeper or countryman, grinning sheepishly or strutting with importance, signified his willingness to serve.

"Not very promising material there," murmured Crewe under cover of the general stir. "We'd better try to get the younger, unmarried men if we can, and the commuters."

"Unless Odell raises his left hand," Lefferts replied quietly but firmly. "He has evidently had some advance information on the panel, and he knows what he wants."

The roll call was finished, and an expectant hush had fallen upon the multitude which packed the room until the stout walls seemed to bulge. Then a sigh like the rustling of a breeze through dry leaves swept the crowd as a side door opened and Mrs. Latimer appeared. Her slim, girlish figure was held resolutely erect, and she glanced neither to the right nor left

but kept her gaze fixed steadily before her and walked beside her guard as one in a dream, completely detached from her surroundings.

Gravely she extended a cool, firm little hand to each of her counsel and took her place in the chair beside them which the guard indicated. As she did so a single, all but inaudible sob reached Crewe's sharp ears, and he turned slightly to see just behind them in the space reserved for witnesses Doris Agnew and her brother seated close together and a trifle apart from the rest. Miss Agnew's eyes were wet with unshed tears, but her brother lounged in his chair with elaborate ease; and only the pallor which seemed to overlay the tan upon his thin face and the slight trembling of the gloved hand upon his cane betrayed the tensivity of his self-control.

District Attorney Dysart stepped forward after the names of the jurors had been taken from the box, and as the first of these was called he cleared his throat portentously. He was a large, fleshy man, his smooth-shaven face only relieved from grossness by the firm line of his bull-dog jaw and the thin curve of his high, hawk-like nose.

"Henry Staples."

A gaunt, grizzled man who seemed ill at ease in his shiny suit of "store" clothes advanced and with grimly set lips awaited the coming inquiries. He was a farmer, it developed, a married man with three grown-up daughters, and he very greatly desired to be exempt.

"What is your excuse?" the district attorney asked peremptorily.

"Got to get my hen-houses whitewashed," responded Staples, heedless of the titter which rippled through the room. He did not object to capital punishment, would as soon convict a woman as a man if he thought she was guilty, but wouldn't send a doggoned horse thief to the chair as long as his hen-houses remained in their present condition. Circumstantial evidence was as good as any, he reckoned, if it went far enough, but he couldn't fix his mind on no argument till them hen-houses was cleaned out. In disgust the district attorney dismissed him, and called for the next prospective juror.

Frank Higby, a burly individual, described himself as a contractor, unmarried, and, judging from his tone, with no desire to enter that hazardous state. He didn't believe in capital punishment because people ought in his estimation to settle their own feuds to suit themselves without recourse to the slow machinery of the law. Moreover, from what he had heard of Latimer, he guessed that whatever he got was coming to him. He had a gang of men on the job now, Micks and Wops, and if he didn't get let off to keep an eye on them he shouldn't wonder if there'd be a few more cracked skulls to occupy the attention of the court. He was hurriedly excused and Crewe made a note which seemed to give him much satisfaction, for a faint smile wreathed his rather smug countenance as one talesman after another escaped from the responsibility which faced them.

At length the name of James Snell was called, and as the rotund, red-headed real estate dealer came

briskly forward Lefferts saw Odell straighten almost imperceptibly in his chair.

Snell didn't know anybody connected with the trial particular, and he hadn't formed any opinion about it, one way or another; but he'd like to be excused because business was opening up, and if he felt called upon by his conscience to convict a new resident of the county it would not exactly encourage prospective buyers in the neighborhood. He was thirty-six, married and had two children; and as he appeared open-minded as far as justice was concerned the district attorney turned him over to the defense.

As Lefferts rose, Odell rubbed his forehead reflectively with his right hand; and although the lawyer did not appear to glance his way he asked only a perfunctory question or two and expressed himself as satisfied with the talesman. Foreman James Snell thereupon took his place in the jury box with a grin of embarrassment upon his ruddy countenance; but it faded as his glance fell upon the slim, black-clad figure beside the guard, and such open naive pity shone from his honest eyes that Lefferts could not resist a quick, triumphant side look at his partner. Odell's psychology had been sound if that were his only reason for his choice; fat men were proverbially tender-hearted, and red-headed people were as a rule quick to temper and quick to forgive, emotional rather than analytical. If, in his final address to the jury—should Odell fail to interrupt the proceedings with the proof of another's guilt—Lefferts could make a strong enough appeal to that emotional side to off-set

the scathing denunciation of the prisoner which would follow, there would be nothing to fear from the foreman.

Salvatore Piccio, who mentioned market gardening as his occupation, was a dark, fiery-looking man of forty, a widower with eleven children, all of whom would most certainly starve if he were not permitted to return to his calling. Moreover, he desired most ardently to go out and hunt up that slave-driver of a contractor who had called his countrymen 'wops' and start a little vendetta of his own. Under pressure, he admitted that four of his children were grown and all eleven of them worked in the truck garden, and he appeared to be so willing to punish anybody for anything that the district attorney turned him over to the defense with the air of one anticipating a challenge as a foregone conclusion.

Odell, however, was sitting hunched over the table with his right elbow resting upon it and his chin in his hand; so to his intense annoyance Piccio took his seat beside Snell, and the selection of jurors proceeded.

By the noon recess half the box was filled. Montgomery Robbins, a portly, well-groomed man of fifty who described himself as a broker and commuter, married but with no children, seated himself with fastidious reluctance beside the Italian; but his reluctance gave place to an expression of shocked outrage when the chair next to him was taken by Herman Sametz, the village tailor. He was an undersized, stoop-shouldered man of middle age, a bachelor, and the rabid socialistic tendencies which he displayed during the

course of the district attorney's brief questioning made the latter glance with keen but puzzled inquiry at the senior counsel for the defense when the latter blandly accepted him. Odell had not changed his position and seemed to have lost all interest in the proceedings; but when the next name was called he roused himself with an air of bored impatience.

It was that of Ellery Minch, one of the leading grocers of Sunnymead, and he appeared to be so obligingly willing to serve, and so conscientiously unprejudicial, that a little stir of surprise arose when Leferts abruptly challenged him. Odell was glancing vaguely about the room pulling at his left ear in an absent-minded fashion, but his right hand went to his head again-when Matthew Kingsley, the naturalist, appeared.

He was a bachelor of sixty-five, a tall, slimly aristocratic individual with silvery hair and a gentle voice. He knew little about the case, living practically in a world of his own, but his intelligently poised mentality was as obvious as his name was well known, and he was accepted with evident satisfaction by both sides.

Orrin Filmore, the captain of a small sloop with which he reaped a rich harvest from summer pleasure-seekers, was next in line and seemed innocuous enough to prove acceptable; but Odell was running his left hand through his hair, and counsel for the defense challenged once more.

Odell had fallen back into his old position with his chin cupped in his right hand when Willis Pruyn, a dour-faced farmer of fifty-eight was turned over to the defense by the district attorney. With his accept-

ance the noon recess was called, and court adjourned.

Over their hurried lunch in the private sitting-room at McMahon's Crewe remarked:

"Really, I do not think that Sergeant Odell displayed much judgment in signaling you to challenge that grocer, Minch. He appeared to me to be open-minded and so willing to sit in the jury that I should have strongly advocated his acceptance."

"He seemed a little too willing, to me!" retorted Lefferts, as he unfolded his napkin. A slip of paper fell from it to the floor, and the lawyer chuckled as he picked it up and read it and then passed it to his companion. "Look at this! Odell is almost as much a stranger in this town as we are, and yet I'd be willing to wager he has the history and characteristics of every man in the panel down pat!"

The paper bore a hasty scrawl. "Filmore's wife in insane asylum for trying to kill him and Minch has personal grudge because Mrs. L. caught him giving short weight and took trade away; has been heard to remark that if he could only get on jury he would fix her. This afternoon if no signs use own judgment. B. O."

The afternoon session filled the jury box. Roscoe Farwell, the artist, was the first man called, and although he pleaded ill health as an excuse, his evident intelligence and stern sense of justice made him a find for the prosecution. Lefferts hesitated, but Odell was energetically scratching his head with his right hand, so the former accepted him in spite of the whispered remonstrance of Crewe.

William McMahon, the hotel-keeper, took the eighth chair in the jury box with Odell's silent sanction; but thereafter the latter seemed to lose himself in a train of thought of his own and sat for the remainder of the afternoon with his hands resting limply on his knees.

Merridew Brooks, a polo-player from the aristocratic country-club colony, was the ninth to be approved. He was a blond, sleek, pleasant-mannered young man of twenty-six and unmarried. The duty which confronted him was plainly distasteful and he strove to wriggle out of it, but no valid excuse presented itself to his amiable mind so he accepted the situation philosophically and took his seat.

The man to occupy the next chair, though of approximately the same age, was of far different caliber. Slouching and surly, he described himself as a garage helper and spurned the modest sum which his services as a member of the jury would net him in comparison to the lordly tips which came his way in the ordinary course of events; but his only excuse being that he was Peter Jenks, the brother of Sam, who drove the milk wagon and who had been one of those to discover the body on the morning after the tragedy, he was forced to accept the honor thrust upon him.

Asa Grinnell, the undertaker, was the eleventh man to be accepted although he protested with revolting insistence that this was his busiest season; and a small, mild, nervously cheerful farmer of middle age named Charles Tilbury, with "henpecked" written all over him, eased himself deprecatingly into the twelfth chair.

With the completion of the jury court adjourned for the day, and Lefferts and Crewe, after taking temporary leave of their pale little client, fought their way through the milling mass of people in the square back to their cheerless sitting-room once more.

As they entered they saw that a small heap of coals was glowing in the grate, and a man rose from a chair before it and turned.

"Sergeant Odell!" Lefferts strode forward with outstretched hand. "Your letters came from the office and your note reached me safely at noon today, but we have waited anxiously for your coming! What news have you for us?"

"Have you brought your man?" asked Crewe before the detective could reply. He spoke superciliously, but Odell laughed good-naturedly as he shook his head.

"No. He is being well guarded for me, though, and I can produce him at any time."

"Well, for heaven's sake, why don't you?" snapped Crewe. "What is all this mystery for? You have kept us in the dark, your letters have been most unsatisfactory, and we have been on tenterhooks for the past three weeks! We've got nothing at stake but our professional reputations, though under other circumstances that would seem sufficient to cause us anxiety—but think of our client!"

"Mr. Crewe is not criticizing your failure to do the almost impossible, Sergeant," Lefferts broke in smoothly. "We know that you have worked faithfully every minute of this nerve-racking time in the interests of our client, and it would have been little short of a miracle had you been able to produce the murderer

of Mr. Latimer and the proof of his guilt before the trial opened; but can't you take us into your confidence now?"

"I'm sorry." There was genuine regret wholly untinged with resentment in Odell's tone. "I do appreciate fully what anxiety you must be enduring and the torture that every added hour of horror and suspense brings to Mrs. Latimer; but if I told you now what I might, all my work would go for nothing. The murderer of Latimer might be accused and a circumstantial case of a sort be made out against him, but he would never be convicted; and Mrs. Latimer's trial would not be halted on the strength of the evidence I could present at this time. I have one thing more to accomplish and then I shall be in a position to lay my cards on the table; but until that is done you will not see me again, for I am off on the first train in the morning."

"But I cannot see why our knowing who it is that you suspect could nullify all your efforts!" expostulated Crewe. His elder partner was studying Odell's face.

"You will understand the vital need of my reticence now when you learn the whole truth," the latter responded. "I know I must seem to have unlimited assurance, gentlemen, but I only stopped in now to ask for your continued patience and faith in me. Our man has played his game and lost through the merest chance, the longest arm that coincidence ever stretched forth to confound a wrongdoer. The murder of Latimer was an incidental result, but he is reaping an unholy satisfaction from it now by means of the most

audacious move in the history of modern crime! Two or three days, a week more at most, and I promise you that I will place it within your power to bring about the strangest scene that was ever enacted in a courtroom!"

"In a courtroom!" Lefferts repeated slowly.

"Yes. You will not have to bother with a warrant, for I will put the man into your very hands."

CHAPTER XXII.

SWORN TESTIMONY

DURING the following morning District Attorney Dysart made his opening address to the jury, and the counsel for the defense listened intently to gauge the strength of the forces in opposition to them.

He opened with a bold move to block any possible attempt on the part of the defense to gain sympathy for their client on the score of the murdered man's faults by making capital of them himself.

"We admit, gentlemen of the jury, that Gilbert Latimer was a thief of the meanest, most despicable type," he said in the course of his peroration. "We make no attempt to deny that he was lower than the thief who robs the poor-boxes of the church, for he robbed men of the product of their brains, the fruit of their genius! But the days have passed when theft is punishable by death, and this man was not killed because he had stolen. The state intends to show you that he was deliberately destroyed because he was in the way, because on the night of February third he returned to his home unexpectedly, at a moment when he might have made a discovery which would have been fatal to the selfish and wrongfully nurtured happiness of others."

He concluded with a dramatic denunciation of the

prisoner and an impassioned assurance that the state would prove her to be guilty of the wanton murder of her husband.

Through it all Margery Latimer sat quietly in her chair, her blue eyes fixed on him with the courteous attention of a wholly disinterested listener to a recondite discourse upon some abstruse and remote subject. Their steady, soft gaze did not waver, nor did her color change at his most scathing arraignment of her; and Lefferts marveled at the secret strength, the hidden depths of fortitude which she revealed for the first time.

When he rose in his turn to address the jury he spoke for the moment extemporaneously and as though inspired, for a swift resolution had come to him to meet his opponent on his own ground. The district attorney had gone into irrelevant details when he unnecessarily attacked the character of a dead man. Gilbert Latimer might have appropriated the ideas, the inventions of others, but at the time of his death it made no difference to his wife because she was totally in ignorance of it; had she known she would never for one hour have remained beneath the same roof which sheltered him.

There was an almost comical expression of dismay on the face of District Attorney Dysart as he listened, but he set his bull-dog jaw grimly while in the gentle, paternal tones which had helped so materially in the winning of more than one famous case in the past Benjamin Lefferts went on:

Mrs. Latimer had her own home, her independent fortune. She had not married hastily as a young girl

might have done, from a momentary infatuation or mercenary desires, but after calm, unworldly deliberation; and she had up to the moment that her husband's body was discovered no knowledge of any reason why she should repent of her choice, nor had she done so.

Counsel for the defense would show, too, that she had not married in the late twenties to avoid the stigma of "old maid," for Mr. Latimer was not the only suitor of her hand. One whom she had always looked upon as a dear and valued friend had cherished the hope that she would become his wife instead and had mistaken her simple cordiality for a deeper regard. Counsel for the defense could have proved this indisputably, for on the occasion of her marriage this disappointed swain had written her a letter which she had preserved through sisterly affection! But unfortunately this letter had been stolen by the dishonest maid of a guest in her home at the instigation of Sheriff John Pettingill of North Shore County, and by him purchased for the sum of one hundred dollars. Counsel for the defense would show this at the proper time by the written confession of the maid herself.

The sheriff fairly gasped at this daring stroke and glanced at the district attorney; but the latter was regarding the senior counsel for the defense through half-closed lids, and a faint, menacing smile lifted the corners of his broad mouth.

Mrs. Latimer had led so sheltered and quiet a life, Lefferts continued, and knew so little of the world, that she had perhaps been a poor judge of character in the selection of her husband; but his death alone

revealed it to her. She had retained the respectful friendship of her disappointed suitor through pity and a genuine liking, but she had given no thought to anyone but her husband, and knew nothing of his return from the station and subsequent death until a neighbor summoned her on the morning after the tragedy. This the counsel for the defense was prepared to prove at the proper time.

Lefferts knew the value of both suggestion and brevity, and he sat down amid a silence that seemed akin to applause.

"Good for you, old man!" Crewe whispered. "That was a daring move about the letter, but you've succeeded in getting in the first word and spiked the sheriff's guns, anyway."

Mrs. Latimer, too, turned a pitiful little smile upon him, and for an instant one of her hands rested upon the table so that it touched his own like a daughterly caress. The next, she had straightened in her chair and her eyes were fastened upon the district attorney who had risen once more in his place and called the first witness, Conrad Vorn.

He and his brother Chris who followed him repeated in substance their previous confession, elaborating in minor details their finding of Gilbert Latimer's body, the prying loose of the anchor, its being dropped in the blood of the dead man and restoration to the boat, and their flight from the scene.

When in turn they were turned over to the counsel for the defense Lefferts had few questions to put, for the prosecution had perforce impressed upon the minds of the jury the fact of the theft of the invention by

Latimer in order to establish the reason for the Vorns' presence at that hour; and as the former had shown it was no part of his program for the defense of the prisoner further to blacken the character of the dead man, he did not dwell upon their motive.

Jimmie Vail in his Sunday suit and with his round face shining from a recent application of soap was the next witness, but neither prosecution nor defense drew from him anything concerning the finding of the body on the following day which had not already been re-tailed about the countryside; nor did his mother, who followed him, add to the general fund of information, although she did insert a remark which at Lefferts' sustained objection was struck from the records, that Mrs. Latimer certainly took the news cooler than anybody she ever did see. She offset this, however, when in the gentle hands of Lefferts she asserted that Mrs. Latimer had taken more interest than any of the other city folks in the epidemic of measles which had ravaged the attendants of the school and had sent fruit and flowers from her own hothouses and conservatories to the little victims, Jimmie among the rest. This, at the instigation of the district attorney, was also stricken from the records as irrelevant and immaterial, but it had at least a momentary effect upon the jury, as the wily Lefferts intended.

The fifth witness was Sam Jenks, and although he tried hard to be important his testimony was negligible. It was only after he had clambered down from his briefly held space in the spotlight that District Attorney Dysart began to unmask his guns.

He called Henry Eaves to the witness stand. Al-

though the prisoner smiled faintly, Crewe and his partner exchanged a warning glance, and the latter braced himself as if for some unknown trouble ahead.

The gardener was sworn and deposed that he had been engaged by Mr. Latimer as general handy man about the place until the spring opened up, when he was to assume the position of head gardener, and had been sent down to take charge at Willow Brook two days before Thanksgiving.

"Who recommended you to Mr. Latimer?" the district attorney asked crisply.

"Mrs. Latimer, sir. I worked on her own place at Fairfield Harbor since she was a little girl, until I married five years ago. Then I took a farm nearby, but my wife died and I began to correspond with Maggie Ruggles. She'd worked at Fairfield, too, and stayed on with Mrs. Latimer as maid, and 'twas through her Mrs. Latimer found out I was lonesome and looking for a chance to get away from there as gardener." Henry replied stolidly without glancing toward the prisoner. When he mentioned her, however, a softened, protective note had crept into his voice which was lost neither upon the jury nor the prosecution.

"Then it was Mrs. Latimer who really employed you?"

"No, sir, 'twas Mr. Latimer," Henry insisted. "I wouldn't say, though, that I'd have taken the place but for Maggie."

"Why?"

"Well, Mrs. Latimer having nobody but Maggie and me that really belonged to her, as you might say, and

there being an opening for a gardener, Maggie thought I ought to be there to look out for her."

"To look out for Maggie?"

"No, sir; Mrs. Latimer. She—Mr. Latimer didn't treat her just right and there was nobody but Maggie to protect her if she ever needed it."

Here Lefferts' objections were sustained, and the district attorney started upon a new tack.

"Eaves, when were you last at the scene of the murder prior to the discovery of the body by James Vail?"

"Tuesday afternoon, sir; the day before. In the morning, before Mr. Latimer left for the city, he came out to give me some instructions about the cows, and he said that he wanted that unsightly old rowboat taken away as soon as the frost broke so that it could be moved. I thought I'd try it that afternoon, frost or no frost, so I went down there."

The two members of the counsel for the defense eyed each other for the second time; the trap was about to be sprung.

"Did you take any implements with you?" The district attorney's voice was velvety smooth.

"A pickaxe, a short lever and a crowbar," responded Henry. "I thought I could break the ice with the pickaxe and pull the boat up by the lever and the crowbar, but I soon saw that it couldn't be done; the boat was too deep in the ice, and falling to pieces at that. I went back then to the tool-house."

"Did you take the three implements with you?"

Henry hesitated.

"Well, sir, I thought I did, but I'm not sure. My mind must have been on something else, for the tool-house is always locked and I keep the keys; yet the next morning I found the lever stuck up in the trellis of the grape arbor."

"Is this it?" District Attorney Dysart suddenly produced a short steel bar flattened at one end, and overriding Lefferts' objections turned to the bench. "Your Honor, I beg to submit this as very material evidence."

Henry examined it with painstaking care and then nodded.

"Yes, sir. I remember that mark on it, made when I was trying to get it under a boulder on the driveway."

"When you found it on Tuesday morning it bore no rust nor other signs of having been out there all night?"

"No, sir."

Dysart bent forward and asked impressively:

"What time was this on Tuesday morning?"

"About half past ten or eleven; anyway, it was after Curry and I had helped the constable bring Mr. Latimer's body up to the house."

"What were you doing in the grape arbor?"

"I—I was talking to Maggie Ruggles, asking her how Mrs. Latimer was taking it, when I looked up and saw the lever. I took it down after Maggie had gone back into the house and put it back where it belonged."

"You didn't ask her or anyone how it came to be there?"

Henry shook his head emphatically, but there was a certain mental reservation in his cautious tone.

"No, sir. I wasn't thinking about it. Mr. Latimer being found dead like that when we all thought he was in the city, and police everywhere asking questions, put it all out of my head. I never remembered about it until after the inquest."

"Did you speak of it then?"

"Yes, sir, to the constable, but it was only after he'd been looking over my tools and asking which one had been missing between Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning; he'd been snooping while I talked with Maggie, and saw me take away the lever afterwards."

"Did Maggie tell you that the lever was there in the trellis?"

A dull red flush spread over Henry's countenance, and for a moment he seemed to reflect. Then he spoke with decision.

"No, sir. Maggie did not tell me that it was there. I looked up and saw it."

Dysart smiled and waved his hand.

"The defendant's witness," he announced.

"Now, Henry," Lefferts commenced benignly, "you and Maggie Ruggles are very good old friends, aren't you?"

"Yes. That's why I began corresponding with her after my wife died," Henry replied with some relief at the change of topic. "She's dependable, not the flighty kind, and I sort of missed her after Mrs. Latimer married and took her away."

"When Mrs. Latimer recommended you to her husband did she tell you that she felt the need of your protection against him?"

"Oh, no, sir. She only told me that she knew no-

body else could attend to things as well as I could, and she would be glad to have another old friend from Fairfield in her service."

After a few perfunctory questions Lefferts relinquished him, and the prosecution called Sidney Curry. His testimony did not differ from that given to the sheriff on his first examination after the murder had been discovered, nor did the story told by the housemaid, Ruth Oliver, disclose anything which she had not already stated at the inquest.

The noon recess intervened; and when Crewe and Lefferts were seated before a hasty meal in their private room at the hotel, the former was sunk in gloom.

"Dysart's trump card is that lever, of course, and he's depending on the constable and the coroner to back him up," he predicted. "A woman could have wielded it and the subsequent blow would undoubtedly have killed Latimer from the evidence of the wound itself. Besides, he's letting the question of how it came to be in the trellis of the grape arbor go too easily unless he has some other witness to answer that. If only Mrs. Latimer had been absolutely frank with us—!"

"She has been!" retorted his doughty partner. "Besides, don't forget that there remains Odell. He asked us to give him two or three days, a week at most, and although the district attorney is rushing this case through as fast as he can, I guess I can string it out until our friend puts in an appearance. Our client is bearing up well, and that is the main thing. She's taking the right attitude, too; neither tearful nor defiant, but calm and dignified as though with the con-

sciousness of innocence. If she holds to it even on the stand itself the prosecutor in his final address to the jury can't accuse her of acting a part for the benefit of the jury."

"But that lever?"

"I admit that it is a poser," responded Lefferts frankly. "We will have to wait until Dysart unmasks his guns and then try to get under cover. We've had cases that went far worse than this at the start, Crewe, and then won them hands down. The trouble is, you have faith in neither our client nor Sergeant Odel."

Crewe threw down his serviette and rose.

"You are wrong there, Ben. I do *not* think that Mrs. Latimer killed her husband, but I have not sufficient respect for any woman's reticence, no matter what its motive, to see her convicted and sent to the chair when the truth would save her—particularly when I am one of those defending her and my professional reputation hangs in the balance."

"What do you mean?" Lefferts' eyes had narrowed.

"Just what Odell meant in that last question he put to her before her arrest. Do you remember it? He said: 'Won't you tell us what you thought you saw down by the pond that night?' I think she was there and saw what happened; I think, whether mistakenly or not, she is shielding someone else, and if by chance her alibi is riddled it is your duty to make her speak."

The older lawyer eyed him quizzically and then laughed.

"My dear Foster, if your opinion were true and Mrs. Latimer was shielding anyone who she fancied was guilty, do you suppose that having gone as far as she

has any mortal could compel her to speak now? We stand or fall by what you choose to call her 'alibi' until Odell returns!"

The afternoon session was opened by the summons of Miss Virginia Jefferson to the witness chair, and the erstwhile cook at Willow Brook flounced up the aisle clad in her most gorgeous raiment for the occasion with a touch of rouge on her dusky cheeks and a sympathetic roll of her eyes toward the prisoner.

When she had been duly sworn and admitted to her name and length of service with the Latimers she repeated under questioning what she had already told Odell on the morning the body was discovered; that on the fateful Tuesday evening she had gone directly to her room when her work was done and knew nothing of Mr. Latimer's departure for the station nor subsequent death until the following morning, when the breakfast which she was serving to Henry Eaves and the chauffeur was interrupted by Bangs with his mistress' order for them to go down and see what was wrong by the pond.

"You did not think it strange that you had not been called upon to prepare breakfast for Mr. Latimer?" the district attorney asked.

"I didn't think nothin' 'bout 'dat gemman, sir, I aims to min' mah own business. Sometimes he used to come down at cock-crow hollerin' fo' his coffee, an' den again yo' wouldn't see hide nor ha'r of him till near noon. I'd done sent up Mis' Lat'mer's toast an' tea, an' I was studyin' 'bout what dessert I'd fix fo' dinner when all de ruckus started."

"What was the first you heard about the murder?"

"When dat constable man done lock me in mah own kitchen!" Virgie tossed her head with its overshadowing plumes. "I ain't nevah been 'rested befo', an' dat's some record fo' a lady what belongs to as many lodges an' societies as I do, an' had two pisen mean husbands besides, but dey wasn't neither of 'em as mean as Mistuh Lat'mer was! Mis' Lat'mer was de mos' patientest lady evah I see, an' 'twas de Lord's jedgment dat he got bust oveh de haid at last!"

"So Mrs. Latimer had reason to wish her husband dead?"

Before Virgie could reply Lefferts' instant objection was sustained by the court, and the district attorney changed his question.

"In what way was Mr. Latimer 'mean', as you say? Remember, I want you to tell only what you yourself have seen and heard, not what has been told to you."

Virgie sniffed.

"I ain't no han' to gossip! I worked fo' de Lat'mers almos' three months in dat apartment in de city, an' I knows enough mah own self without listenin' to no tales. Mr. Lat'mer had de worstest temper evah I see, but Mis Lat'mer nevah answered him back 'cept once, an' dat was 'long in de fall when he bought Willow Brook, an' dat was jus' to beg him not to bring her out to dis God-forsaken hole."

"Mrs. Latimer called it that?" Dysart demanded sharply.

"No, sir. Dat's what I calls it!" Virgie retorted with spirit. "I disremember her precise words, but she didn't want to go to de country, away from all her friends. He done told her dat she could come out here

or go to de debil; I remembers *dat* part of it all right, but jus' den dat cat-footed Bangs shut de do'. Mistuh Lat'mer was always free wid money, but he was mo' free wid his language if things didn't go like he wanted, an' crossin' mah palm wid loose change don't cross out bein' called bad names from mah min'! Sence we been out here in Willow Brook seems like Mistuh Lat'mer only come home when he wanted to quarrel, an' Mis' Lat'mer, she don' quarrel wid nobody, even him! She only got mo' quiet an' white an' thin every day."

"You say Mr. Latimer was quarrelsome," Dysart interposed hurriedly. "Did you overhear the subject of his—er—arguments?"

"Sure did," affirmed Virgie. "Mos' anything dat went 'cording to his dislikes at his office or factories or out here would get him goin,' an' yo' didn't have to overhear nothin'; yo' couldn't help hearin' lessen yo' was deaf, which I ain't. Even dat las' Monday night befo' he was killed he come home ugly an' sent two of my special dishes back to de kitchen wid word dat dey wasn't fit fo' no dawgs to eat. Den when I'd done cleaned up mah kitchen an' was goin' upstairs to mah own room I heard him bellowin' at po' Mis' Lat'mer down in de front hall an' I looked over de banisters. He had her by de wrists an' her face was all twisted up wid pain. He was hollern' some questions at her 'bout a gemman, an' she was saying 'no', dat he mus' be mad."

"What gentleman? Did you hear his name mentioned?"

The district attorney's question was all but lost in

Lefferts' quick objection, but after a war of wits Judge Mapleton ruled that the witness must reply, and Virgie said:

"'Course I did. It was Mistuh Starr Agnew. Mistuh Lat'mer cussed him up an' down, an' asked had she heard from him, an' dat she wasn't to see him nor his sister no mo'. I'd heard him argify lots 'bout dem Agnews befo', though he treated dem fine when dey called in town, but dey hadn't once been out to Willow Brook. Mis' Lat'mer did get up some spunk dat Monday night; she said he was beside himself an' she wouldn't listen an' she broke away an' come on up to her own room. I had to move quick so's she wouldn't see me, but she was rubbin' her wrists like he'd hurt her somethin' terr'ble."

"Did you go to your own room then?"

"No, sir, not right away. I kind of waited 'round an' heard Mistuh Lat'mer tell Bangs to order the car out, that he was goin' to the city. He must have come back again on the last train like he did the Saturday night befo', because bright an' early Tuesday mornin' he was up an' fussin' all over de place."

"Did you hear any further conversation between himself and his wife?" Dysart asked.

"No, sir. He had breakfast by himself, but when he came home from the city dat evenin' everythin' mus' have been all right, for dey had dinner togedder and was talkin' real peaceable in de liberry when I went up to bed. I listened an' heard their voices an' dat's all I knows. But I wants to fin' out does witnesses get paid, an' can I sue dat constable man for lockin' me up in mah kitchen dat day?"

Replying briefly in the negative to both queries, the district attorney turned her over to Lefferts; but that wily lawyer, realizing that she was a dangerous if willing ally, dismissed her with a few trivial questions.

The baggage master followed her on the stand and repeated his description of Latimer's arrival at the station on the night of the murder, of his conversation with the unknown man and of seeing neither of them again after the eight-fifty pulled out for the city. When he was turned over to the defense for examination Lefferts made him describe the unknown man over and over as well as he was able until Hiram Claggett's patience was worn to a thread; and when he was finally excused he was so bewildered that he would have sworn to anything. But the lawyer had adroitly made his point; he had succeeded in impressing upon the jury the importance to the case of the man with whom Latimer had last been seen alive, and the seeming negligence of the authorities in not locating him and proving his identity.

There was an ugly smile on the prosecutor's face when Coroner Hale was called to the stand, but his examination by both sides was brief. He told of his autopsy and the subsequent inquest and reluctantly admitted that the blow which caused Latimer's death might have been inflicted by the lever with comparatively slight strength behind it.

It was mid-afternoon and a nervous restlessness manifested itself not only among the spectators but in the jury box itself. They had settled down to a routine in which there was no immediate promise of

sensational developments, and the strain was plainly showing. Montgomery Robbins, the broker, was frankly bored, as was the artist, Farwell, and even the alert foreman Jim Snell had slumped in his chair. Merridew Brooks was cheerfully if silently baiting the surly Jenks and grinning at acquaintances among the fashionable spectators and only Kingsley, the naturalist, listened with grave attention to every word.

When Alfred Bangs was summoned and came mincing forward, however, there was a stir of renewed interest which increased as he was sworn and gazed with unmistakable animosity at the prisoner's calm face.

After the usual preliminary as to the nature and length of his service to the Latimers, he repeated the statement which he had formerly made to the sheriff and Odell, and later at the inquest; but that odd significant hesitation in his tones was so markedly increased that the district attorney asked:

"You say that amicable relations existed between Mr. and Mrs. Latimer during dinner on the night of the murder?"

"I said they didn't talk much." Bangs wet his lips with his tongue and glanced once more at the prisoner. "Mr. Latimer spoke and she answered in a quiet kind of way. You couldn't tell whether they was just keeping up appearances or was on friendly terms."

"What were they talking about?"

"I don't know, sir; I only caught bits of it as I was serving them, and besides it's not my place. I think, though, they were discussing something they'd started before ever they came to the table, for I couldn't

get the hang of it at all. He kept asking her if she was sure, and she seemed surprised that he was so excited about it, whatever it was. They went into the library and talked for a few minutes, and then he went to the station and she to her room."

"And you saw no more of either Mr. or Mrs. Latimer that night?"

"Well, so I told the sheriff, but I wasn't under oath then, sir, and they never asked me at the inquest." Bangs straightened and his small eyes gleamed. "I try to be loyal to them I serve, but perjury is another matter. I did see Mrs. Latimer again that night; it was all of ten o'clock and she had on that moleskin coat, with that lever there in her hand!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WITNESS FOR THE DEFENSE

FOR an instant an electrified silence reigned throughout the courtroom, and then all at once it was in an uproar which the presiding judge himself seemed powerless to quell. Foster Crewe turned with a look of melancholy triumph at his partner, who sat running one hand nervously through his shock of snowy white hair, and only the prisoner sat unmoved, her eyes fixed disdainfully upon the witness, who alternately bridled and cringed beneath her steady gaze.

"Where did you see Mrs. Latimer?" demanded the prosecutor when quiet had once more been restored.

"At the back of the house, sir, going toward the grape arbor," Bangs asserted. "I'd heard a noise in the cellar, and thinking maybe it was burglars, for Mr. Latimer had a fine stock of wines stored there, I went down to investigate. I'd gone to see if the outside cellar door had been tampered with, thinking they'd never have broken into the house and gone down by way of the pantry stairs, but everything was all right and I'd turned to go back into the house again when I saw Mrs. Latimer. It seemed so funny to me, after I'd not been able to get any response by knocking on her door only an hour before when the telephone call came for her, that I stood and watched.

I saw her go into the grape arbor and lift the lever high over her head with both hands and stick it through the trellis work. Then she went back into the house again and upstairs to Maggie Ruggles' room with me following. There was a low light there, but it went out after a bit and I didn't hear a word said, so I went to my own room and to bed. I didn't know what to make of it, sir, till the news of the murder came in the morning, and then—well, I just didn't like to speak of it before."

The district attorney asked only a question or two to confirm the main points of his story in the minds of the jury before, with a satisfied nod, he turned him over to the defense. Old Lefferts rose, squaring his shoulders defiantly. His tone, however, was as kindly as though the erstwhile butler had just given the most favorable testimony to his client as he asked:

"You are very sure, Bangs, that the lady you saw was Mrs. Latimer? There was no moon that night, you know. Couldn't it have been any other woman in the household wearing her fur cloak?"

Bangs shook his head decisively.

"No, sir. The arbor is twenty feet or more from the house, but I wasn't more than five feet from her when she came out of the back door, and the stars shining on the snow made everything as bright almost as moonlight. There's no one in the house or in all Sunnymead that I ever saw who's got hair that pale gold color like hers, and I couldn't have been mistaken."

"Then you are attempting to establish her identity solely by the color of her hair under the night sky?"

Lefferts' gently voiced inquiry was interrupted by a bellow from the district attorney.

"I object, your Honor! I object to the senior counsel for the defense attempting to lead the witness!"

His objection was overruled and Bangs announced stubbornly:

"There isn't anybody going to lead me by the nose. It was Mrs. Latimer. I saw her face when she turned and I smelt that perfume she uses. She was wringing her hands and muttering to herself as she went into the house, and she never knew that I was right behind her, she was that wrought up!"

It was in vain that Lefferts resorted to all the tactics learned in the course of a long career. The man's testimony remained unshaken, and with an added note of triumph the district attorney called Constable Wex Price to the stand.

The latter's rotund form was all but bursting with importance, but he strove to appear nonchalant and gave his testimony with many jerky gestures of his short, plump arms. The only new item of interest which he unfolded was the meeting between Maggie Ruggles and Henry Eaves in the grape arbor on the morning that the murder was discovered.

"It was eleven o'clock, as Henry Eaves said," he remarked. "We had brought the body up to the house and I was looking around the grounds once more before going back down to the village, when I saw this here Maggie come out and beckon to Henry, who was loitering near the cow-barn. They met in the grape arbor and she did most of the talking for a few minutes. Then she left him and went back into the house, and

as soon as she'd gone he looked straight up over his head, took down some tool and walked away. I had so much on my mind that I didn't think of it until after the inquest again, when I asked him, as he says, what tool had been missing that he'd found in the arbor, and he gave me the lever."

Under examination by the counsel for the defense the constable could not swear that it was the same object which he had seen Henry carry away, but it had looked like it from where he stood—a short, heavy bar with a point at one end. No, he hadn't seen anything else in the tool-house that looked so much like it. Henry Eaves hadn't wanted to talk about it either, but he had gotten it out of him.

Maggie Ruggles then took the stand. Her sharp, acidulous face was set in firm lines and she carefully avoided her mistress' eyes, fixing her gaze upon the district attorney much as though he were some alien insect whom she had encountered in the course of a general housecleaning.

When the formal opening queries had been put and replied to the district attorney cleared his throat, and Maggie, gripping both arms of her chair, tossed her head valiantly as if impatient for the combat to commence. Foster Crewe passed a slip of paper over the table to his partner, and after a glance at it Lefferts crumpled it up and put it in his pocket without even looking toward the younger man. Crewe had written: "What has the woman got up her sleeve? Look out for trouble."

"Miss Ruggles, you have corresponded with Henry Eaves since the death of his wife?" asked Dysart.

"Off and on!" Maggie's smile was more like a set grimace. "He's been taking notice."

"Do you mean courting you?" Even the prosecutor could barely suppress a smile at the aspect of the gaunt, unprepossessing spinster before him.

"And why not, pray?" Maggie held her head high, but a dull flush mounted in her cheeks. "I wrote him that I would not leave Mrs. Latimer and that's why he begged me to get him a job with them, too. I may not be as young as some, but Henry's had enough of the flighty, high-heeled, pleasure-loving kind, and I'm a good housekeeper, if I do say so. I've practically given my word to Henry, if it's any of your business!"

For the first time since the trial began the prisoner gasped and leaned slightly forward in her chair, but Maggie sedulously refused to meet her gaze.

"It is very much the business of this court!" The prosecutor was goaded into a retort. "On the night of Tuesday the third, at what hour did your mistress retire?"

"At half past eight, and she was asleep by nine so sound that the old Nick wouldn't have been able to wake her up, in spite of what that sneaking, blackmailing Bangs may say, as no one should know better than me, seeing as I gave her a headache powder. It was in her glass of hot milk that I made her drink and she never knew it, but she couldn't have waked up till the next morning if the world came to an end."

A quick stir ran again around the courtroom, but the judge sharply silenced it and Dysart asked:

"Did Mrs. Latimer go to your room at ten o'clock or a little after that night?"

"I should say not! She couldn't have been waked up, sir, or I wouldn't have taken her coat like I did." Maggie spoke in a matter-of-fact tone, but this time she glanced toward her mistress in a sort of shame-faced apology.

"You took Mrs. Latimer's coat?" the district attorney demanded in a stillness so tense that it might almost be felt.

"Yes, sir. I've no mind to be telling my private business in public, but I'm going to show up the truth about that Bangs if it's the last act of my life. He knew I had some land of my own and a little money laid by and he set his cap for me. When I wouldn't look at him he took up with that French thing that works for Miss Agnew, but he's been mad ever since Henry came. Tuesday afternoon I saw Henry fussing around that old row boat down on the edge of the pond and I ran out for a word with him, but by the time I got there he'd gone. I saw, though, that he'd left one of his tools behind him, that thing you call a lever; and knowing that if Mr. Latimer should come home and find it there he'd raise Ned I brought it back and leaned it against the back porch, meaning to tell Henry about it, but I forgot. That night after I'd got Mrs. Latimer safe asleep I went to my own room, but after about an hour I thought I smelled smoke and went down the front way to investigate. Bangs hadn't fixed the fire screen right in the library and a spark had dropped out on the rug, but I threw the water from a vase of flowers on it and then went to open one of the windows that look out on the pond to let the smoke out for a minute. It was then that

I saw somebody I thought was Henry down among the willows, and I—I wanted to speak to him. I got Mrs. Latimer's moleskin coat from the hall closet, for it was mortal cold, and went down there."

"What did you see?" the district attorney asked hastily. "Who was the man?"

"Just that dumb fool Chris Vorn! I never laid eyes on his brother nor Mr. Latimer's body if it was there then, but I started back to the house the back way. I remember that coat caught on something, but I just twitched it off and ran. I didn't want Henry to maybe see me there and think I was bothering with that half-wit, and I supposed that Vorn was cutting across home from the village. When I got near the outside cellar door I saw another man, but it wasn't Henry, either. I didn't recognize him at first, but he was fussing with the door as if he was trying to break it in, and I remembered that lever and grabbed it up and started for him! Then I saw that it was Bangs himself, and he was fixing that cellar door to make it look as if somebody had broke in from outside."

"Why should he do that?"

"Reason enough!" Maggie snorted. "He knew Mr. Latimer would be away for the night, and it wasn't enough for him to sample the private stock of liquor when he served it; he wanted a few bottles for himself or to sell, maybe, on the quiet, and he knew that Mr. Latimer kept pretty good tabs on the stuff he had left. I sneaked back, meaning to tell on him the next day and not wanting him to catch me looking like a fool with Mrs. Latimer's coat on. Then I thought again

of that dratted lever, and I knew if he found it he'd try to put the blame for the broken cellar door onto Henry, to get even because I'd given him the mitten. I didn't know what to do with the thing, so finally I hid it in the trellis of the grape arbor and went back into the house and straight up to my room. In the early morning, about five, I slipped downstairs and hung the coat in the hall closet again, and I never knew anything about that piece torn from it till they brought it out at the inquest."

Lefferts turned now and regarded his partner in dazed bewilderment; but that gentleman was rapidly scribbling a note on a bit of paper and smiling to himself, and a low exclamation from their client made the older man turn again quickly with a warning "Hush."

Mrs. Latimer sat with her thin little hands clasped tightly together and a smile transfigured her face as she murmured softly over and over under her breath: "The darling! The dear, faithful soul!"

At Lefferts' touch upon her arm she pulled herself together and her hands dropped limply in her lap as she bowed her head for an instant and then looked straight ahead of her once more with her habitually calm gaze.

Dysart tried vainly to shake Maggie's testimony, but she clung tenaciously to her original statements. He asked a final question:

"What was your purpose in giving your mistress a powder to render her unconscious without her knowledge, as you have affirmed?"

"Because she don't believe in them and would never have taken it if she'd known; but I've taken care of

her since she was fourteen and I know what's best for her. She'd had a headache, and I meant she should have one good sleep anyway."

With a sign of surrender the district attorney turned her over to the counsel for the defense. As Lefferts rose Crew slipped into his hand the bit of paper upon which he had been writing. Glancing at it the older man saw: "Why Bangs blackmailer?"

"Maggie, just now you spoke of Bangs as a black-mailer. What did you mean by that?"

"Because that's what he was, or tried to be, sir!" Maggie responded. "I didn't know he'd seen me in that coat, but why didn't he tell about it when the gentlemen were questioning him or afterwards? Because he went to Mrs. Latimer and told her it was her he saw, and that he knew well she'd not been in her room when the telephone call came for her. He said the whole thing was none of his business but he could make a lot of trouble for her if he opened his lips, though he'd keep quiet for a nice little present of five thousand dollars. It was lucky I was in the next room putting away some fresh linen and heard it, for Mrs. Latimer herself can prove that what I'm telling you is the truth!"

"When was this?"

"On Wednesday afternoon, sir, when Mrs. Latimer was supposed to be resting according to the doctor's orders! Of course she refused Bangs, but I guess he kept on hoping up to now! 'Twas me that wore that coat down to the pond on Tuesday night and left a piece of it hanging on that holly tree! 'Twas me that Bangs saw with the lever, and I've done no harm. If

anybody says different they're lying, court or no court! I'm afraid to face no man!"

Nevertheless, with his eye upon the clock, Lefferts compelled her to repeat her story in its smallest detail and drew her testimony out till it was time for an adjournment until the following day.

As they thrust their way through the seething mass in the square Lefferts heard a strange, unprecedented sound beside him. It emanated from the lips of his partner and appeared to be a chuckle.

"What are you crowing about?" demanded Lefferts. "Maggie has taken things into her own hands with a vengeance, but we aren't out of the woods yet."

"Why not? That loyal old creature has knocked their case to pieces!" Crewe exclaimed. "We'll see Mrs. Latimer tonight and if she'll stick to it—"

"She'll stick to it because it is the truth, as far as it goes!" Lefferts snapped. "There's a reporter just behind you; wait till we get to our room."

When they were safely ensconced in their private sitting-room the older man turned savagely on his companion.

"Granted that Maggie's story is true, do you know what the next move of the prosecution will be? They'll put that maid Jeannette Dulac on the stand and she'll swear she found that love letter and gave it to the sheriff, receiving no money in return, and she'll repudiate that confession, saying Odell frightened her into making it. Of course the sheriff will back her up. They'll put Miss Agnew and then her brother under fire, and between them Dysart will get the story of an old love affair which he'll magnify for all it is

worth to the jury, trust him for that! Then they'll call Mrs. Latimer herself, and the Lord knows what mess her quixotic ideas will get us all into. Starr Agnew can't prove his alibi, we can't produce the woman Latimer was interested in and our attempt to drag that sordid sort of thing in will only militate against us. We haven't a single witness to call for the defense, and no matter how long I try to string it out the case is bound to go to the jury tomorrow or the next day, unless Odell returns!"

They ate a cold and indifferently served meal, had a brief and unsatisfactory conversation with their client in the jail and returned to discuss the case fruitlessly until far into the night.

Lefferts' room was on the second floor at the back, facing a yard littered with provision cans and the bottles and barrels of a past era. He was just tumbling into bed when a pebble twanged against his shuttered window. His tired brain was puzzling over it in a dazed fashion when a second small stone hit with greater force, and a sudden wild hope made him spring across the floor and throw wide the shutters.

In the shadow of a pile of boxes a single figure stood, and at sight of him the usually imperturbable lawyer uttered a low but fervent exclamation of thanksgiving.

"Sh-h!" the man in the shadow warned. "Can't talk. Let them call all their witnesses tomorrow and don't bother much to cross-examine them. When the time comes for you to call your own witnesses, follow these directions and don't deviate from them. Can you catch?"

Eagerly Lefferts held out two shaking hands and caught between them the stone about which a cord had been tightly bound with one end trailing. Yard by yard he pulled it up until a stout packet of typewritten papers bounced over the sill to the floor; but when he leaned out again the figure had disappeared. Carefully shrouding his window once more, Lefferts turned up the lamp and glanced over the papers. A few minutes later he was pounding loudly upon Crewe's door, and for the rest of the night two pajama-clad figures engaged in a puzzled but exultantly hopeful debate.

When court opened the next morning Lefferts, predictions proved true in every particular. Miss Agnew's maid asserted that her confession was a frame-up, declared that she had found the letter by accident and in the interest of justice had turned it over to the sheriff. The letter itself was admitted as evidence (although Lefferts strenuously tried to carry the point he had raised in his opening address) and proved to be an incoherent but so unmistakable a betrayal of the love that had existed between the then Margery Fairfield and Starr Agnew, the misunderstanding which had separated them and his grief and reproach at her hasty marriage, that it scarcely required Jeannette's cleverly drawn out testimony of messages and stolen meetings since to seal the matter in the minds of most of the jurymen.

Miss Agnew's stout and indignant denial of any renewal of the old affair did not carry weight, for it was evident that she could say little from actual know-

ledge and her brother's unsubstantiated attempt at an alibi was received with open disbelief.

When finally Mrs. Latimer was called to the stand the excitement had risen to its highest pitch, and it was with the utmost difficulty that order was restored. She repeated her story as she already told it, but somehow her small figure had lost its appeal, and Lefferts permitted her to leave the stand without a single corroborative question.

Instead, when the state had rested its case and the defense was asked if it wished to call any witnesses, he rose with an air of unruffled dignity and addressed the bench.

"If it pleases your Honor, I have several witnesses to call whose testimony will be vital to a true verdict in this case. The first is Nita Howell, at one time called Latimer."

In the startled commotion which filled the room a woman appeared from the back and made her way rapidly, with a lithe, swinging grace, down the aisle. She had coppery red hair which gave her dark skin an olive tinge, and her hennaed brows were shaven to a thin, straight line. In a full, rich voice she took the oath and then, turning, gazed slowly with an odd, feline smile down the length of the jury box and back again.

"Mrs. Howell." Lefferts had glanced down at a long typewritten strip of paper which he held in his hand. "You are a married woman?"

"I'll say so!" the witness for the defense replied emphatically. "I married Bob Howell in nineteen-ten, at Fairfield Harbor, Massachusetts."

Mrs. Latimer had started forward in her chair, gazing with wide eyes at the other woman, but Mrs. Howell did not notice her. She seemed instead to be absorbed in some contemplation which afforded her a measure of grim amusement.

"Is your husband living?" Lefferts continued.

"Very much so!" Nita Howell laughed outright. "He's right in the courtroom now underneath your eyes and he has been since this trial began, only he isn't wearing the same name. He's in the jury box!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MAN IN THE JURY BOX

THE prosecutor's roar of objection burst thunderously on the stunned silence, but shrill above it arose the scream of the woman in the witness chair.

"Look out! He'll cheat you yet—you need him bad! He's doing something to his wrists!—There, that man, number seven; you call him 'Farwell'!"

All eyes turned to the jury box, to see Foreman Snell whirl about, overturning his chair to grasp the struggling man behind him; but sturdy William McMahan, who had handled many a rough customer in his own bar in the old days, had already seized the erstwhile artist and was holding both hands well above his head; one gripped a keen razor blade and the wrist of the other dripped blood.

Judge Mapleton peremptorily halted the trial while the sheriff, for the first time in the history of the court, climbed into the box and subdued the juror and Coroner Hale bound up the injured wrist.

District Attorney Dysart was dumbfounded at the sudden change in the course of events and a veritable pandemonium existed among the crowd of spectators. The writers at the press-table were scribbling madly, their messengers plunging back and forth through the throng, and the faces of Crewe and Lefferts were a study. Only Mrs. Latimer, staring at her unex-

pected witness, seemed oblivious to all that was going on about her, when the judge suddenly rose from the bench.

"Court is adjourned!" he announced. "This situation is unprecedented in my jurisprudence, and I will hold a private hearing in my chambers. Meanwhile, Sheriff, lock up Number Seven apart from the other gentlemen of the jury and put a guard over him. Keep the witnesses at hand."

Fifteen minutes later, in the spacious, book-lined room of the judge upstairs in the old courthouse, a curiously ill-assorted group were gathered together. Besides the judge himself, the prosecuting attorney and the sheriff, Lefferts and Crewe and their clients, the woman who called herself Nita Howell sat at the long table. There came a light tap upon the door and at Judge Mapleton's command to enter Sergeant Odell appeared upon the threshold.

A low, simultaneous exclamation broke from the sheriff and District Attorney Dysart, but the young man advanced with smiling deference.

"Your Honor, will you pardon my intrusion? It was I who found and brought Mrs. Howell here, and we arrived only in time to prevent a serious miscarriage of justice, I am afraid. I have proof of the identity of the actual slayer of Gilbert Latimer and I will with your permission wait within call until you need me."

"You may remain here, sir." The judge motioned toward a chair. "I presume you have acted in the interest of the defendant?"

"Only incidentally, Your Honor; I have acted in the cause of justice, detailed for special duty from my

own department in New York City at the personal request of District Attorney Dysart." Odell bowed toward that gentleman, who glared at him in response. "It was through no fault of mine that I only reached Sunnymeade with my witnesses in time for them to appear for the defense."

"We will proceed." Judge Mapleton turned to Nita Howell. "Will you tell us your story, madam?"

"That's what I'm here for, Judge," she responded. "Ten year ago Bob Howell and I were members of a theatrical troupe touring New England, and we put on everything from 'Charley's Aunt' to 'East Lynne' according to where we were. I was playing soubrette and ingenue then and Bob was doing a little of everything, including juveniles and scene-painting. He was good-looking and I was crazy about him, so when the manager flew the coop and left us stranded in Fairfield Harbor we got married and settled down for awhile. But we were just kids and it didn't last."

She shrugged and the judge asked:

"There is a record in existence, I presume, of your marriage?"

"Yes. Mr. Odell has a copy of it from the Methodist church with him right now.—Bob got a job at house-painting and we took a fisherman's shack down on the shore and everything was all right for the summer." She paused and turned with a shamefaced air toward Mrs. Latimer. "This—this lady might remember me, though she was only a girl herself then."

"Indeed I 'do, although you — you seem changed, somehow." Mrs. Latimer spoke impulsively before

Lefferts could stop her. "My maid Maggie Ruggles recognized you down here about a month ago."

Nita Howell nodded grimly.

"That's what started all the trouble," she observed briefly and then turned to the judge once more. "By the time that autumn came, Judge, both Bob and I were sick and tired of our bargain. I missed the excitement of the old life, and I didn't look so good to him with the glamor gone, shoddy as it was. I woke up one morning to find him gone, but I'd saved enough to get me to New York and I joined another company there that was going on a western tour. I did well, got with a higher class show the next season, and for four years I never heard a word about Bob. The first news I got was that he was dead, killed in a fire in a moving picture studio, and Mr. Odell has the telegram, for I'd always kept it. The name of an old friend was signed to it, but I found out afterwards that Bob had sent it himself, for— for a reason. I—I guess I'd better not tell any more with this lady present; I've done her enough harm already."

"Please!" Mrs. Latimer shook off her lawyer's restraining hand and rose. "Judge Mapleton, may I not hear? When Mr. Lefferts called Mrs. Howell to the stand he said she had at one time been called 'Latimer'! I must know what she was to my husband!"

The old judge hesitated for a moment and then announced:

"You may remain, Mrs. Latimer. Proceed, please, Mrs. Howell."

"Well, it isn't just the pleasantest thing in the

world, but I guess I've got it coming to me and she'll have to know sometime," that lady remarked philosophically. "Bob sent me that telegram because he'd turned thorough crook and he'd heard that a certain rich manufacturer of tractors named Gilbert Latimer was crazy about me. He thought if I was free this man would marry me and then he could appear on the scene and blackmail me; and he thought right except for the blackmailing part. That was six years ago, and Mr. Odell has a record of that marriage, too, before a justice of the peace in Omaha. Mr. Latimer had settled a good bit of money on me—I'd seen to that!—and he turned out to be pretty much of a brute; so when Bob turned up and explained his little game to me I couldn't see it for a minute, shelling out my capital piecemeal to go on living with a man I hated and didn't have any real hold on, after all. I took a leaf from Bob's book, beat it, and financed a company of my own to tour Australia.

"We went on the rocks but I got in a stock company in Melbourne, and never came back to the States till last summer. Mr. Odell has my old contracts to prove it, and I swear I wasn't responsible for the report of my being lost at sea that reached Mr. Latimer. The name I had taken together with those of the rest of my company was on the passenger list of a ship that was wrecked with all on board going from 'Frisco to Sidney when I started my tour, but we sailed on the next boat instead."

Mrs. Latimer, who had sunk back white-lipped in her chair, now started eagerly forward once more.

"Then when Mr. Latimer married me he thought that he was free?" she cried. "Oh, I should like to think that of him, anyway!"

"You can, for he was free, you know." There was an unusual gentleness in Nita Howell's tone and her hard eyes had softened. "I was never his wife while Bob was alive, even though I thought I was.—When I reached New York last August I was flat broke and walking Broadway looking for an engagement when the first person I ran into was Bob! He told me he was a real artist at last, faking pictures for some crooked art dealer, and that he had a bungalow down here and everything. I wouldn't have known him if he hadn't spoken to me first, for his face was all changed—reconstructed, they call it. He'd been blown up in some chemical explosion in a paint factory, and he never was nearer the war than Hoboken!

"He told me that Mr. Latimer thought I was dead and had married again, and that he was a big man besides, the head of an airplane company. He put up a proposition to me to make fortunes for us both, and though I wouldn't listen at first, he just laughed and gave me his address."

She paused and a red tide flooded her olive skin, but the judge said sternly:

"Go on."

"That's what I did do!" She straightened in her chair and the hard, defiant look returned to her eyes. "I went on and on from one agency to another, but I'd been away so long nobody remembered me, and there didn't seem to be an opening even in burlesque for a third rate actress with an Australian stock

wardrobe of the vintage variety and ten years of hard work beginning to show in her face. I'd never done anything crooked before, but you begin to think differently about a whole lot of things when you haven't eaten for awhile and your landlady locks your room on you. Not that I'm making any excuses; I didn't think or care who Mr. Latimer was married to then, but I began to remember his rottenness when I'd married him in good faith, and at last I went to Bob.

"Of course I'd married Mr. Latimer legally under my own name, Nita Howell, and Bob went to him last September down at his plant in New Jersey and posed as my only relative, my half-brother Roscoe Farwell. He brought him to see me to prove that I was alive, and got ten thousand out of him for me to go away quietly and get a divorce. Bob split all right with me then, and of course I didn't try for any divorce; I took an apartment in town and lived like I'd always wanted to, while Bob put the screws on Mr. Latimer. He made him come out here and buy the Hopewell place and live so that he could keep an eye on him, and he told me he was getting a thousand a month out of him, but he was getting five; that's why I'm squealing on him now, the crook!

"Every time Mr. Latimer showed signs of balking, Roscoe Farwell's sister would come down to pay a little visit to her dear brother, and our fall guy would come across mighty quick. Every time I saw him, though, I hated him worse, for I remembered the blows and curses he'd given me in the little while we'd lived together; and I began to make him pay up a

little in my own way by taking me about in town and showing me attention, just for the fun of seeing him writhe! Of course I took good care that—that this lady never saw me, for I'd learned as soon as I went into the game with Bob that she was the girl who had lived all alone with a shrew of a housekeeper at the old Fairfield place where we'd been married; and although ten years is a long time I wasn't taking any chances on her recognizing me. I didn't count on that Ruggles woman being with her still, though, and that's where we slipped up.

"On the Saturday night before—before Mr. Latimer was found dead, he'd taken me to the Palais du Plaisir and I must have goaded him too far, for in the taxi going back to my apartment he struck me. That was the limit for me, and the next day I went down to Bob and told him to raise the tax on the brute or I would go straight up to Willow Brook and demand the rights I was supposed to have. Of course that would have got Bob in Dutch for blackmail even if we lost our graft, and he had to promise and kid me along; though he was sore because he knew he was already gouging Mr. Latimer for all there was in it, and I was the goat.

"I stayed around, and on Monday Bob ran in to town and saw Mr. Latimer at his office; at least, he told me when he returned that he did. I guess it was true, for I showed myself on the porch of the bungalow when Mr. Latimer drove past on his way home from the station and if looks could kill I'd certainly be under ground now!"

She stopped, shuddering, as a quick thought came to her, and the judge asked, hastily:

“When did the maid, Maggie Ruggles, see you?”

“The next day, Tuesday. She was standing on the porch of that ramshackle little cottage across the way talking to the woman who lives there when I came out of the bungalow to go to the station for the ten o'clock train for the city. Mr. Latimer was going to call on me that evening, and I'd made up my mind that I would break a promise I had made to Bob and talk finances with him; I had a hunch that Bob was double-crossing me some way. I thought the Ruggles woman looked familiar, for she had turned up her nose at me in Fairfield Harbor because I'd been what she called a 'stage woman,' and I'd hated her and made scenes more than once in the village during that summer long ago, but I couldn't place her at first. She stared hard at me and then said something to the Vail woman and stared again.

“I went back into the bungalow and missed my train watching through the window; but in a little while I saw her go back up the road to Willow Brook, and then I remembered. Still, I wasn't positive, and to make sure I described her to the baggage man when I got to the station. When I heard her name I knew the truth, and that my one chance for more money out of Mr. Latimer was that she hadn't recognized me.

“When he didn't show up nor send any word that night I made up my mind that the game was up and packed for a quick getaway. It was well that I did, for early the next morning Bob came to me.” She hesitated. “Mr. Odell has told me that a wife can't

testify against her husband and Bob's still that, but I'm going to tell you all I can. Bob said that Mr. Latimer had promised him a check for the previous day, that Tuesday, but it hadn't come. It was to be sent to that art dealer's that Bob faked masterpieces for, and he waited there until it was time for him to catch the train that would get him to Sunnyside by eight-twenty. As he started away from the station, Mr. Latimer's car drew up, and Bob thought it would be as good a time as any to remind him of that check. He waited around till the baggage man had walked away and nobody else was near, and then he went up to Mr. Latimer and learned that the game was up for fair. Mr. Latimer knew who we were, and he was going to get the proof from Fairfield Harbor and hound us in every corner of the globe until he had us both sent up. That's—that's all I can tell you except that when I read the early afternoon editions of the papers I was on a train bound for the West. I had the jewelry I'd managed to collect in the past four or five months and the cash I'd drawn from the bank, but I hadn't a friend to go to, and I was afraid of hitting any of my old towns; it seemed to me as though I'd played a one-night stand in every burg that had a name on the map and every Hick in each place was bound to remember me. That's what a scare will do to you!

"I took a chance and stopped at a hotel in Buffalo long enough to shave my eyebrows into a thin thread and have them and my hair dyed red, and that made me feel a little easier; but something seemed dragging me back to New York where I could keep in

touch with things. Not with Bob! I—I never wanted to lay eyes on him again, heaven knows! I packed two bags with just my plainest things, sent my trunks to a storage warehouse directly from the station when I got back to New York and went to a cheap rooming house, but the woman who ran it had a son on the police force, so I moved quick and kept on the move; that's why it took Mr. Odell so long to find me.

"When he did, though, I was nearly crazy reading about this trial and Roscoe Farwell being on the jury and gloating over Mrs. Latimer. He had always hated her since he found me that day on Broadway just because her having married Mr. Latimer spoiled a bigger game he thought he could have pulled off. Under the threat of having me arrested for bigamy he had an idea that he could compel me to go back to Mr. Latimer and through me get much more money out of him and keep it all for himself without its being necessary to split with me or anyone. I knew, too, that he'd try to convict her for—for another reason, and didn't know what to do. I was glad when Mr. Odell did finally come; it was sort of a relief even though I knew it would mean prison for me for blackmail, because the man who had used and cheated me would get his, too. I—I guess I mustn't say any more."

"May I suggest, your honor, that both the prisoner and the witness be conducted from the room?" Odell interposed quietly before the judge could speak. The latter darted a keen, significant glance at him and gave the necessary order, and the sheriff escorted Mrs. Latimer to the door, with the other woman following willingly at his heels.

When they had disappeared, Judge Mapleton turned to the sergeant.

"You desire me to examine Farwell now?" he asked. "The woman may be lying for revenge. Have you a case against him?"

For answer, Odell smilingly laid upon the table an oddly shaped hook of steel about a foot long and half an inch thick, with a seven-inch wooden handle.

"I propose to prove, Your Honor, that this is the weapon with which the murder was committed. It is a case hook, used by baggage men to unload crates and bales from trains. The coroner will corroborate my statement that if grasped by the handle and brought down in a smashing blow with the rounded side it might well have caused the wound in Latimer's head."

"Well, this is highly irregular, but so is the whole proceeding," Judge Mapleton assented. "I have no mind to draw any further ridicule on the court than it will inevitably receive in the press for the manner in which the prosecution has been handled. The sooner we can get at the truth the better, but I will ask you to examine Farwell, since you appear to know more about this affair than anyone else present."

The district attorney flushed darkly and thrust out his pugnacious jaw, but Odell merely bowed in response. When the sheriff returned he was dispatched once more to bring in the man they had known as Roscoe Farwell.

He entered jauntily in spite of the grayish pallor that had overspread his face and the cough which caught him by the throat as though it would strangle

him. Dr. Hale followed, and at a motion from the judge he seated himself. Farwell remained standing, and a slight smile curled his lips as he saw the case hook lying upon the table.

"Really, that is remarkably clever, my dear Odell!" he drawled deliberately. "I admit that in spite of knowing your record I had underrated your power of deduction. I suppose my charming wife has gone fully into such details as she knows, but I did not tell her that before I followed Latimer from the station that night I picked up that hook from the baggage truck and found it most effective."

Judge Mapleton conscientiously interrupted with a brief exposition of the law governing confessions in the case of a capital offense, but Farwell merely shrugged wearily.

"Why delay the game, Your Honor? I have already received my death sentence from Doctor Hale." He pointed to his throat. "A few months in a dry, arid climate or a few weeks in a cell; what does it matter? I followed Latimer home from the station when I learned that through my wife's stupidity he had discovered the truth, and I killed him with a single blow of the case hook. It was quite simple, and ten minutes later I was smoking a cigarette at my own hearth. I did not know that I was to have the ironic satisfaction of sitting in judgment upon the woman who had told him of my real relationship to my supposed sister and so unwittingly freed him from the hold I had upon him. I killed him because he had become useless to me, and I did not care to be prosecuted for so petty and sordid a crime as blackmail. The

next morning when I went to the city to inform my wife of what a mess she had made of things I carried the case hook under my coat and dropped it quite openly upon the baggage truck at the station. Before my train came I had the pleasure of seeing Hiram Claggett pick it up and exclaim that he had been looking for the 'danged' thing all morning. Sergeant Odell, I am saving the state and the authorities you so ably represent a great deal of trouble by my frankness; won't you tell me how you deduced the matter of the hook?"

"I knew that the murder was no more premeditated than that meeting at the station had been, and I naturally concluded that the man who killed Latimer would not appear forearmed for the occasion," Odell responded quietly. "I went down to another station far away and looked about to see what I could pick up in the darkness if the idea of murder suddenly presented itself to me, and I found a case hook identical with this; that it all."

"Simple enough, like all great achievements." Farwell nodded, and then broke into a paroxysm of coughing. "And now, Your Honor, may I be excused? I have lost much blood through my foolish attempt to end this affair prematurely, and I find that jury duty is more fatiguing than I had anticipated; but you will admit, I am sure, that I fulfilled a unique position commendably to the last!"

* * * *

"Young man, now that our friends have left us I should like to ask you a few questions about a matter that we do not mention before them, especially now

that the man Farwell, or Howell, will never be brought to trial." Lefferts sat back in his low basket-chair on the lawn at Willow Brook one balmy May day and pointed significantly to the slender figure of Mrs. Latimer as it disappeared over a rolling hill accompanied by a tall, masculine one which swaggered along in military fashion.

Crewe laid down the book which he had been idly browsing over and snorted.

"That was to be expected, but they are not the only ones!" He waved toward the grape arbor at the rear where Maggie and Henry Eaves were industriously searching for imaginary grubs among the young tendrils of the vine. "I was curious enough to ask Henry what had first led him to think of changing his present state of freedom to one of servitude, and he told me that it was Maggie's testimony at the trial. He said that any woman who would lie like that for her mistress would make a splendid wife for any man who wanted to go in business for himself, and I rather fancy he pities me! I tremble for you, Benjamin, every time that new stenographer pats her bobbed head and announces that you are out."

"You needn't." Lefferts laughed. "Maggie lied with praiseworthy intent and Mrs. Latimer from the oldest motive in the world, for I'm convinced that Adam took the first bite out of that apple and Eve lied to save him! But have you heard the true story of that night, Sergeant Odell?"

The young man shook his head.

"I can surmise it, I think," he said. "Remember that according to Howell's confession Latimer wasn't

killed until about half past nine. I think that the sleeping powder was a mere fabrication; that Mrs. Latimer, in the misery of mental torture and unrest, put on her moleskin coat and wandered down to the pond, where chance led her to the lever. I have always thought that she witnessed the murder and mistook Farwell for Starr Agnew; their figures are really very much alike in silhouette, even to the military bearing. She may have picked up the lever in some instinct of defense; and when the murderer ran away she got back to the house in a daze and went to the room of her only confidant in the household, Maggie."

"You've hit it." Lefferts nodded. "It was Maggie, though, who put on the coat and taking the lever outdoors hid it in the grape arbor. She has told me that when she met Henry there the next day she did not tell him where the lever was; she merely told him to 'look up.' After she'd gone he did so and acted upon his own judgment. But we are waiting to hear what first put you on the trail of Farwell."

Odell laughed in his turn.

"He did himself! When he waylaid me at the station in town, dragged me to a coffee house and impressed his theory of Mrs. Latimer's guilt upon me, at the same time protesting that he was a mere bystander, I began to ask myself why he had taken the trouble to try to make me view the case from his standpoint; and I remembered that either he or Mr. Kingsley might well have loitered at the station in Sunnymead to speak to Mr. Latimer. It couldn't have been Kingsley, of course, and I commenced then to

look a little askance at my friend Farwell. He gave me an unusual cigarette, too, an imported Xerxes, and I kept the stub.

“When the opportunity presented itself I called upon him at his bungalow as he had invited me to do, and recognized upon the easel in his studio a bad copy of a snow scene which the Argus Life Insurance Company had figured on their complimentary calendars two years before; yet he assured me that it was a bit from the edge of Chris Vorn’s farm. A fake artist would only hang about a place like this in winter if he were lying low, or had some hidden interest here. He showed me the photograph of his ‘sister’ on the mantel, and I bore the likeness in mind. Then, too, he seemed to me to have taken an abnormal interest in the funeral of Latimer that morning. When I mentioned Maggie Ruggles, he started but denied ever having been in Fairfield Harbor though he admitted readily enough that he had ‘toured’ New England, but changed it at once by explaining that he meant a sketching tour.

“He was an incessant smoker, and it came to me that if by any chance he had been on the scene of the murder that night he might have dropped a cigarette stub. On my way to that conference with you in the library here I stopped at the pond and hunted around till I found the end of another Xerxes cigarette like the one he had given to me, but stained and shapeless from soaking in the thawing snow for four days.

“When I talked with Mr. Agnew again I realized the similarity in appearance between the two men

and divined the mistake in identity which Mrs. Latimer might have made and which would make her attitude clear. Next I learned about the other woman to whom Mr. Latimer was attentive, and her general description answered to that of the photograph of Farwell's 'sister.' I realized, too, that Farwell might have been the man to beard Latimer in his den last September down in New Jersey, and that the woman then discussed could have been some other than Mrs. Latimer.

"After Mrs. Latimer's arrest I had a talk with Maggie that made the whole case plain, although I was not then in a position to prove anything. She told me that only that morning before the murder she had recognized in the supposed 'sister' of the artist down the road a woman from a theatrical company that had been stranded in Fairfield Harbor a matter of ten years before and who had married an actor from the same troupe that might have been this artist himself, only his face was less drawn. I went to town, found out that Latimer was being systematically blackmailed, and the rest was easy. I took a trip myself to Fairfield Harbor and discovered some long-remembered inhabitants who recalled the couple and readily identified them from my description of Farwell and the woman of the photograph.

"Meantime I had a couple of men from the department out West following up Latimer's career, and they brought back the data on that Omaha marriage. The hardest job I had was finding Nita Howell, but I traced her from one rooming house to another until I finally located her; I couldn't have given you enough proof without her help to halt Mrs. Latimer's trial,

and I certainly could not have told you that I suspected the murderer to be Farwell, or neither of you could have avoided giving the show away. When I found her and worked upon her mingled sympathy for the prisoner and desire for revenge on the man who had used her and cheated her, she was willing as you saw to tell all she knew. That's all there was to it."

When he had finished there was silence between them for a moment, and then Lefferts exclaimed:

"It was superb! If it hadn't been for you, Sergeant, Mrs. Latimer might now be facing the chair itself!"

"To say nothing of our professional reputations gone!" added Foster Crewe. "We are more indebted to you than we can ever repay!—But I think it was a mistake of Mrs. Latimer's to help that Howell woman away to Australia. Besides the blackmail, she was an accessory after the fact of the murder, and if the local authorities, who have been out for blood ever since the fiasco of that trial, ever learned the part we allowed ourselves, a firm of our standing, to be induced to take in the escape of that fugitive, we should be utterly ruined!"

"No fear!" Lefferts responded. "The little woman knew from experience what it was to face a judge and jury on a criminal charge, and much as Nita Howell had wronged her she would not be instrumental in bringing the same fate down upon her."

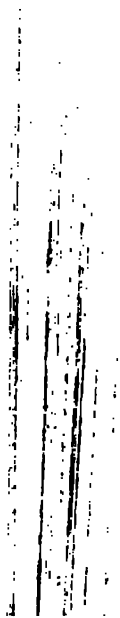
"But it couldn't have been the same," Crewe argued pedantically as of old. "The Howell woman would not have faced a capital charge, but merely that of being accessory."

Lefferts smiled and one of his hands fell lightly on Odell's arm.

"She would not have had so splendid a champion," he concluded. "Nor, if she were innocent, could it ever be proven that the real criminal in the case was a man in the jury box!"

THE END.





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